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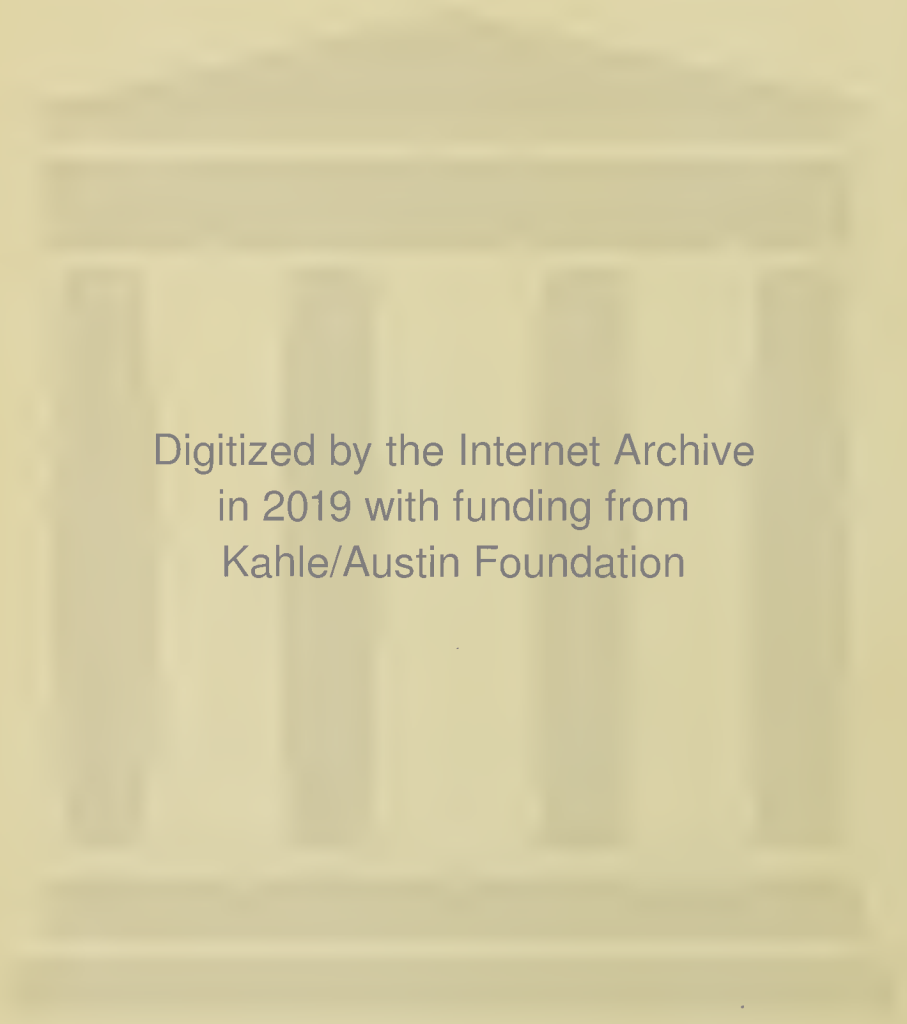

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THE LAKE AND THE WOODS

THE LAKE AND THE WOODS

OR

NATURE'S CALENDAR

BY

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WITH WOOD-ENGRAVINGS
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ROUTLEDGE & KEGAN PAUL

PG 3478 .P7 S3 1951

First published in 1951
by Routledge and Kegan Paul Limited
68 *Carter Lane, London, E.C.*4
Printed in Great Britain by
Western Printing Services Limited, Bristol

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SPRING

THE SPRING LIGHT

To naturalists like ourselves, observing the changes of nature from day to day, spring begins every year with an increase of light. When the sun turns back towards the summer the country people say that the bear seems to be turning over in his den, and although winter with its snow and frosts is still with us, the gypsy sells his sheepskin.

January in Central Russia: the excited crying of the hooded crows, the fights among the house-sparrows, the dogs on heat, and the first nuptial sports of the carrion crows.

February: the first drop of water falling from the sunny side of the roof, the song of the great tit, the house-sparrows building their nests, and the first drumming of the woodpecker.

January, February, and the beginning of March—all these show the Spring Light. The ice first breaks up in the sky, and

you can see it best of all from a large town, between the heavy masses of stone-built houses. During this time I am working in the town like the devil, piling up the roubles like a miser, and when I have had my fill of money-grubbing, I feel like getting away from it all, somewhere where I am out of reach, somewhere where I can be happy and free. Yes, he is a happy man who sees the beginning of the Spring Light in a town, and then, in the country, sees the Spring of the Waters, and the flowers, and the woods, and later still, perhaps, the spring of man.

When, after a hard winter, the Spring Light glitters, everybody in the country brightens up and asks the same old question: how's the spring going to come this year?—and every year it never comes in quite the same way as it did the year before; no spring was ever exactly like another one.

This year the Spring Light lasted much longer than usual. The glitter on the snow was almost unbearable, and everywhere they were saying:

'It will be over in no time!'

People starting out on a long journey by sledge were afraid they might have to abandon the sledge somewhere and do the rest of the trip on horseback.

Yes, a new spring is never like the old one, and that is what makes it worth while being alive—the excitement and expectation of something new this year.

Our peasants, as they meet one another, talk of nothing else but the spring:

'It won't be long now!'

'No, this will be over in no time!'

THE FIRST CUMULUS CLOUD

RIGHT in front of the house there was an enormous snow-drift, and as it lay there in the sunlight it gleamed like the smooth, unruffled breast of a swan. I opened the door with some difficulty, since it was clogged up with the snow that fell last night, and I began to dig a trench with my spade, clearing away the soft white flakes of this latest fall, and the thick, heavy layers underneath.

Not that I complained about the drift, for up there in the snow-filled heavens sailed a cloud, huge and warm, and quite unlike the clouds of winter, but also gleaming like the smooth, unruffled breast of a swan. Everywhere, both on the earth and in the sky, my innocent visions were returning with the spring, but I greet them now with none of that old, mad alarm, I bear with them without despair. Like spring, the visions come and go, and as long as I live they will come back again. So why should I despair about them? I am not a child now; I am the father of a family, and monarch of all I survey.

It is no joke, either, being fifty; remember what the old book says about it: till your land for six years, and during the seventh

let it rest and recover. After seven times seven it will be your fiftieth year; then take your horn and blow, for this is your jubilee.

'Now, you chaps!' I called. 'Up you get, and jump to it! Come and give me a hand, it's going to be my jubilee!'

Their names are Lyovka and Pyetka, and very keen they both are on sport in the woods. It's my own passion, and I had very carefully brought them up to it. They're both of them good shots, and never kill at random, but only for the pot or when we needed a specimen for the museum. So they are much less hypocritical than those people who oppose blood sports, and yet buy their game in the shops. It makes them much nearer to nature, I believe, and it even gives them a better chance of respecting their fellow human beings. From the New Year until early spring, during the close season for game, they had spent most of their time dancing in the town, getting back to our house in the village at all hours of the night. According to them, this was another form of *shooting*. Lyova had already started a moustache. He had been borrowing my razors on the sly from time to time. But the younger boy's upper lip was still quite clean.

After the 'Forty Days', that is to say, when the rooks and the larks and all the small migrants were back, they dropped their dancing, and gave all their spare time to getting ready for the woods and for the mating of the blackcock. When the wildfowling at last began, and they came back late in the evening after a day in the forest, they would remember with astonishment those evenings spent in the dance hall, and they would swear they had only gone there for want of something better to do.

'Now, boys,' I say to them. 'You know where we are, we're in the middle of the Spring Light. We shall be having the cellar full of water soon, so hurry up, and get digging!'

We dig together famously, and this willing labour fills the heart with gladness.

I stand there, leaning on the spade stuck deep into the snow, and for the life of me I cannot tell what it is that pleases me so much.

Above the purple forest two crows are playing, turning somersaults in the air.

So that's what it is—that's what I'm feeling so pleased about —those two birds. On a bitter winter morning, when the frost seemed to be crucifying the sun on gleaming pillars covered with snow, when man and beast had hidden themselves away, and the ordinary birds of summer would have been falling dead out of the sky, and when I, the only living soul in all that whiteness, was riding along uncertainly, wondering whether I should ever get home safe—on a bitter winter day like this I saw that black crow flying high over the white pall, his frozen wing-feathers whistling as he went.

Now this same crow is feeling the urge of love; the lower bird strikes against the other one in his flight and goes up higher and higher, then the other follows suit, and so they take it in turns, climbing up into the sky, and then suddenly, with a cry, swooping down and starting all over again.

Two crows turning somersaults—what could be finer than that? There is a melody in the heart, and instead of words the whole blue heaven cries out to me, and in the bright, snow-filled sky rides the warm cloud, like a great white bird, lifting high its smooth, unruffled, swan-like breast.

THE LOADED SLEDGE

ACCORDING to the traditional folk almanac, if in autumn the meadows are covered with gossamer, it is a sign of a good harvest, or if the hoar-frost stays on the trees over Christmas, it also means a good harvest, and when the snow piles up properly, it is also a good sign; but if the cock doesn't crow on St. Eudoxia's day, then it will be a hard spring, and if there is a snow-storm that day, the peasant sweeps everything out of his bin. Straw, oats, hay—anything will fetch a good price.

But in our forest, where in winter they haul the timber to the sawmills, any delay in the coming of spring is all to the good; it means a couple of extra weeks with the sledges. I am quite happy too when the snow remains a little longer and the Spring Light grows so powerful that the high-piled clouds, real clouds of summer, sweeping across the sky, leave their swiftly moving blue shadows on the snow. When the Spring Light seems to be

holding itself back, the joy of expectation becomes almost unbearable.

I know quite well that there is much poverty in the world, and that sometimes it seems almost inhuman to speak of the joy of life, but at the same time it seems to me that if only we could somehow describe our joy with greater care, and thus deceive some of the weaker vessels, it would be just what was needed.

Towards evening it began to freeze hard, but the tremendous summer clouds remained in the sky till dark. The moon lay on her back, and among the stars one shone out more than all the others, ceaselessly changing its colour from blue to green, and from green to red, and then to blue again.

Why should I try to suppress such a moment? My heart was full of gladness, and I was not afraid of anything.

You are probably thinking that I write in this manner, like other Russian writers, so that later, by contrast, I can more effectively tell you some tale of disaster. With my hand on my heart, I assure you: nothing of the sort. I just want to write a story with a happy ending; where everybody marries and lives happily ever after.

The runners of a heavily loaded sledge squeaked through the cold air. It was impossible to go round it through the deep snowdrifts, so willy-nilly I had to keep behind, and shorten my stride to suit its pace.

Timber-hauling like this in the winter months is only done by the strongest and healthiest men, owning a good horse which can stand the hard work. The poor and the weak stay indoors on the stove. Walking through the villages in winter you can tell at once who these are; all the gates are closed, and there is not a single track on the snow, not even a cat's.

The sledge moved on without a word being spoken, except an occasional direction or encouragement to the horse. Both these men, walking miles together by night with the sledge, were an epitome, in their emotions and minds, of the life of a whole people, undergoing an experience without parallel in history.

'Miron Ivannitch,' I said, 'tell me what you did during the war, when you were taken prisoner.'

After a few moments' thought, he began:

'I don't know what country it was in, or what town. In Germany? No, it wasn't in Germany. Austria? No, not Austria. We

lived in a church, and all the officers and the way of life there were German. . . .'

Miron Ivannitch began his story just as the old people began their folk-tales: in a certain kingdom, in a certain country . . .

'When was it? What year was it?'

'What year? I don't remember now. It was in the time of the Tsar Nicholas, of course.'

That was as good as saying—in the time of the Tsar Gorokha. That's how they make up folk-tales; time and place are made as far away as possible, and even the most ordinary happenings somehow become magical.

Once upon a time 360 Russian prisoners of war lived in a camp, went out to work, and lived on soup. This soup was usually made from some kind of red meat, probably dog-fish, for the German cook, when he dished it out, used to bark like a dog. One day a new prisoner is brought into the camp; the fellow seems fairly intelligent and has plenty of money. He is not allowed to go out and work with the other prisoners, but after a good deal of whispering with those who were going out, he hands over some of his money and asks them to get him, by fair means or foul, a knife. They manage to get one from a civilian, and bring it in to him. Then this new prisoner starts digging a secret tunnel under the plank beds, and promises them: 'I'll have you all out in no time.' Then he cuts out one of the floor-boards very neatly, and covers up the hole so that nothing can be seen. For the first attempt about a dozen men agree to try their luck. Miron Ivannitch was asked, but he refused, and said: 'I'll wait and see how you get on. Send us a letter when you can.' One night some of the bolder spirits get away through the tunnel, leaving no trace. Some time after a letter arrived from one of them; everything had gone off very well. Miron Ivannitch envied them their escape, but when the next group was being arranged, he still could not make up his mind. After this they started to vanish in twos and threes, and the Germans began to wonder what was happening. They strengthened the guard, but men were still escaping under their noses, and they could not find out how it was being done. Sooner or later, of course, they would have tumbled to it, but in the meantime the Germans had their revolution and hoisted the Red Flag. At this point even the officers dropped the Russians a pretty clear hint that they could all clear

off; the guard might shout, but they needn't take any notice of that, he wouldn't shoot. Most of them did clear off; only Miron Ivannitch remained behind, with the idea in his mind that since they had had their revolution, everything would soon be all over. Then one of the officers said straight out: 'Clear off!' but no; Miron Ivannitch demanded a pass. The officer laughed. 'Get out!' he said. 'Take yourself off. Nobody will touch you, and I can't give you a pass.' Two or three days went by, and Miron Ivannitch was left alone with the guards. This was too much for the officer. 'Here,' he said, 'here's your pass. Now you can go.' Even then Miron Ivannitch was not fully convinced. He showed it to another officer, who countersigned it. Then he showed it to the sentry, who let him go. And Miron Ivannitch walked back to Russia.

'Why did you demand a safe-conduct,' I asked, 'after everybody else had gone?'

'Because I thought it would show our strength, when a German officer agreed to our escape.'

Then Miron Ivannitch began to praise the intelligentsia, and assured me that if it had not been for them he would have been lost when he returned home from the prison-camp. He had imagined that coming home would be like entering heaven, but when he did get back he found his family had been scattered and that he could not make head nor tail of things. He went into the town to consult an old friend of his, Vassilisa Petrovna, the wife of a well-to-do merchant. 'Instead of me helping you,' she said, 'you must help me.' She handed over all her possessions, large and small, including even the silver, to hide somewhere and keep for her. 'I shall be all right,' she assured him.

During this long digression about Vassilisa Petrovna I had lost the thread of the argument, remembering it with some difficulty.

'But, Miron Ivannitch, we were talking about the Russian intelligentsia. What's that got to do with Vassilisa Petrovna?'

'Well, it was like this,' replied Miron Ivannitch. 'If it hadn't been for her, I should have had to take my chance. As it was, I found my feet at once. Now I have a new house; a horse that does the work of two, as you see; a cow giving milk all the year round, and a yard full of sheep!'

At this point Miron Ivannitch left the sledge and went over to a snow-drift to relieve himself. I turned to his strapping son:

'Petrusha, why don't you join the Komsomol?'

'I would, only I don't like to annoy the old man. If it weren't for him, I'd have joined long ago.'

'What would you join for?'

'Well, in the factories the Komsomol members get the pick of everything. If it weren't for the old man, I'd be getting sixty roubles a month now, instead of following these timber loads all night for twenty.'

That was the son's idea of the Komsomol.

Then his father, catching up with the sledge again, said:

'Thank God for the intelligentsia!'

That was the father's idea of the intelligentsia.

After this we trudged on in silence, while I pondered over my story with a happy ending.

THE EARTH SHOWS ITSELF AGAIN

THERE had been three whole days without a frost, and the thick mist had been working secretly over the snow. Petya said:

'Come out here, Papa, and have a look! How nicely the yellow-hammers are singing! Do listen!'

I went out and listened. It was quite true; it was very pleasant and the breeze was quite soft. The road was beginning to get yellow and bumpy.

It seemed as if somebody had been running hard after spring, and at last had caught up with her and touched her, and spring stopped and stood there lost in thought. The cocks were crowing all round, and the blue woods began to show up through the mist.

Petya looked long and hard at the thinning vapour. He noticed something dark in the field, and shouted:

'Look, the land is showing!'

He ran into the house, and I heard him shouting there:

'Lyova, come and have a look, quick! The land is showing!'

Even Mother could not hide her excitement, and came out into the yard, shielding her eyes from the glitter of the snow.

'Where? Where?'

Petya stood in front and pointed into the snow-covered distance, like Columbus over the sea, and repeated:

'Land! Land!'

THE MIST

TOWARDS dinnertime the sky cleared, and the blue of the forest in the distance deepened almost to a purple colour. Lyova brought exciting news:

'The water is gathering in the hollows!'

Petya had noticed that the blackcock were settling in among the trees, and choosing the site for their display.

'Perhaps they're just feeding there,' I suggested.

'No,' he replied. 'Not down in those old, gnarled trees; there's nothing there for them to feed on.'

I rode down to the village along the path dug out of the snow to fetch some provisions. On the old road at the side the loaded sledges were going to market. Along the path it was thawing rapidly; the water was flowing down into the ditch in torrents, but the old road, firm and smooth with the constant passing of the sledges, remained as hard as iron; the peasants would be pulling their loads along it for a long time yet, for it was the only link between the villages at this time of the year.

The mist still had not lifted completely, and I could not see the village. But I could hear the cocks crowing there, and the nearer to the village I got the louder they crowed, and it was not so much a crowing as a roar, the whole village seemed to be crowing like a cock. Soon the rooks will be cawing over their nests, and chasing the crows away, and then, towards Yegor's day, the cows will start, and last of all, the maids will begin to sing.

THE FIRST SONG OF THE WATERS

TOWARDS evening we went out to try calling the hazel-hen with a decoy whistle. In the spring we beat them out, but only for fun; and very amusing it is to watch them running here and there on the hard crust of snow, stopping

every now and again and listening, and sometimes coming so close that you can almost catch them in your hand.

It wasn't so easy coming back; there was a very light evening frost, but the snow was too soft to walk on. We were slipping all over the place, and found it very hard to get our feet clear of the wet snow. There was a hard and glassy orange sunset, and the pools in the swamps gleamed like windows. What was that? It sounded like—but could it be?—it sounded like a blackcock muttering. Anxious to know, all three of us climbed up to the top of a piled-up drift and listened hard.

I puffed at my pipe, and the smoke appeared to float slowly away from the north. We listened in that direction and suddenly realized what it was—down below, not very far away, the water was flowing under a little bridge, making a noise for all the world like a blackcock.

THE PAIRING OF THE CAPERCAILLIE

It was a starry night, and it was beginning to get very cold indoors, so I went out to see what it was like outside. It so happened that at the same time my neighbour, an old peasant, had also taken it into his head to come out and have a look round, and we met on the doorstep.

'Freezing hard to-night,' I said.

He did not reply at once, but looking first at the snow, and then at the starry sky, he pushed his foot into the snow and said:

'The grandson follows his grandfather!'[1]

I tried the snow with my foot as well; it was quite hard and bore my weight.

'Good for the grandson,' I said, and went indoors to wake the boys up.

I told them that this was probably the last hard crust we should have before the thaw, and we ought to take advantage of it and go over to Vorogosh to see the pairing of the capercaillie. Even if we didn't hear the song, we would at least see them beating their wings on the snow.

[1] The country people always speak of 'Grandfather Frost'.

'Father, you're a masterpiece,' Lyova said happily, and began tugging at his brother, who was still half-asleep.

Everything went well that day; the road was easy, and we were as cheerful as crickets. All the woods and marshes for miles around were well known to us; we had beaten them for game and coursed over them with the borzois, and for all the islands, marshes, and patches of higher ground we had our own special names. There was Bright Meadow[1] with its three tall pines, under which we usually flushed a hare or two; there was a dry patch between two broad marshes which we called Mon Repos; and there was a Golden Paddock; while about eight versts farther on, among some lonely swamps, there was a hill covered with pines which could be seen from some distance away. The local people called it simply the Hump, but we christened it the Alaun Highlands.[2] Over the hard, powdery snow-crust we soon covered the eight versts to the Hump, and on the higher ground we could feel the first stirrings of the breeze from the south. Then I remembered how everybody said in springtime: 'It won't be long now', and I began to worry a little. If this south wind keeps up, I thought, and we have a sunny day, we shall never get out of this wild spot.

As we waited for the first light we rested against the trees and listened. How true it is that you can spend all your life in the woods, observing and studying everything, yet something suddenly occurs and you realize you know nothing. As we listened we heard a crackling underfoot in the swamp below us; something pretty heavy must be moving about down there, for the ice was flying about like broken glass, tinkling again as it fell. The monster, or whatever it was, that was breaking the glass in the swamp, moved swiftly in our direction, and all three of us, with our fingers on the trigger, and holding our breath, waited for him in the darkness. But just before it reached our island the Thing went off in another direction. On the dry patch we called Mon Repos the crashing ceased for a time, but then the glass started to break again, and could be heard without a pause, or at least imagined. Then, when the red dawn broke in the other direction, Petya first heard the long-wished-for call, and then

[1] The allusion here is to Tolstoy's family seat Yasnaya Polyana.

[2] The only considerable range of hills in European Russia, usually known as the Valdai Hills.

Lyova. True, it was some distance away, and my ears were full of the singing of the crickets, so I didn't hear it, and as far as I could judge the elk was still breaking glass in the swamp. They heard it first, and it was their privilege to jump down and run, not without a certain amount of risk, through the glassy marsh.

I was quite happy watching the wonderful dawn and basking in the soft south breeze, and I stayed there on the hill looking down on the marsh, half-hidden by the dark pines.

How long had I been standing there? The red streaks in the sky had actually faded when suddenly there was a shot down below—one of the boys. So much the better, I thought; I was really more anxious for their success than for my own. But I felt the urge to jump down with them; as I made the third jump I heard the unmistakable and indescribable sound of great wings. I turned quickly towards the sound, and saw against the faint red glare between the crowns of the trees the silhouette of a large capercaillie. I fired almost at point-blank range, but the second bird of the pair escaped. Never mind, one was enough. The bird fell on an enormous ant-hill under the pines, and on this still lifeless ant-hill I sat with my face to the dawn.

There was another shot from down below, but I didn't give it much attention, for as the sun rose it revealed a world of mystery round my ant-hill, and I bent the whole power of my mind to the solution of the puzzles it presented. Under the ice there was a narrow channel through which a stream of water was flowing. How could this have come about? My theory was that when the snow began to melt a field-mouse had forced its way through, then it froze again, and when the real thaw started the channel worn by the mouse was used by the water for its flow under the ice.

Perhaps I fell asleep, but in the open air I sleep with all my wits about me; it is only the time which passes by without being observed. I was awakened by a twig which had been weighed down with the snow, and its upper end frozen in the same ice where the mouse-run had been taken over by the flowing water. This twig suddenly sprang upright and stood before me like a young tree. I roused myself, jumped up, and saw blue water all round the spot we called the Alaun Highlands.

That we were cut off on an island never entered my head; we should get out somehow. That wasn't the point. The joy of

seeing the Spring Light and the Spring of the Waters again—it was boundless, and I remembered the passage from the old book: 'Till your land for six years, and during the seventh let it rest. After seven times seven, it will be your fiftieth year; then take your horn and blow, for this is your jubilee.'

I unscrewed the barrel of my gun and blew down it with all my strength. The boys ran back in alarm, but I told them to do the same with theirs:

'Blow your horn, my lads, this is my jubilee!'

THE SPRING OF THE WATERS

This year, when my land was resting, I had no need to wonder what to do with myself. I was going to write, and write to suit myself, noting each day of spring, and making the earth itself the hero of my story.

I had felt the need of jotting down the appearances of nature when I gave up the long spring journeys I had been accustomed to make; I stayed still, but the world went on. So this present year I had laid down for myself a programme of observations and notes, in the accepted scientific manner, but in the rough drafts I also put down personal events as they affected me—meetings, stray thoughts, and so on—so that this spring my own life became part of my observations.

On the day I noted 'The Pairing of the Long-tailed Tits' Petya was told at school that the higher grade was being reorganized as a seven-year school;[1] he could sit for a leaving certificate, but if he wanted to go on with his education properly he would have to go to another town. We had all been thinking for a long time that we would like to be nearer the water, and had written to Pereslavl—Zalesski, near the lovely Lake Pleshcheyevo. It so happened that on this day of the long-tailed tits and Petya's seven-year school I had an answer from the director of the Pereslavl museum. He told me that the school there was quite good, and that the boys would be able to go on with their local studies in the museum itself; that there were plenty of birds in the district, and farther afield elk, lynx, and bears; that three

[1] I.e., an elementary school.

versts from the town there was an historical monument on the high shore of Lake Pleshcheyevo where the galley of Peter I is preserved; that in the empty palace they were thinking of setting up a research station, and that if I cared to make this my centre for observation I could rent any apartment in the palace itself that I cared to.

Finally the letter gave detailed instructions about the journey, either through Moscow or by rail via Berendeyevo.

What wonderful things names can be, and how such a name works on the mind! The palace he described sounded to me like the fabled palace of the Tsar Berendei,[1] and I said to myself:

'There you are, Berendei, this is just the thing for you.'

I like nature—I have a passionate feeling for nature, but that by no means prevents me from liking a fine, handsome town, with its activity and its life; you can always get away when you want to; you sit down in a tramcar and in twenty minutes you are in the fields again. Of necessity I am a free and easy sort of fellow. For years I have lived in the huts of fishermen, hunters, and peasants: I like working people, and am never quite at home in the houses of the rich, but this does not stop me from liking towns and palaces. The devil take your little log hut, where during the heavy rains of summer the only dry place is on the top of the stove, and in winter you cannot take your overcoat off.

Strike while the iron's hot! Hammer up the boxes, and pull the cord tighter and tighter!

'Lyova!' I cried, 'kneel right down—and pull, or it will all come apart on the road. Petya! Oil and clean the guns; I hear they have lynx and bears up there!'

Leaving the boys to pass their examinations, off we went, and over our heads the wild geese flew north, also to Lake Pleshcheyevo.

THE RETURN OF THE CRANES

At length we found ourselves inside the walls of the Goritski monastery, which at one time had been large enough to shelter thousands of people from the town below. It was

[1] Tsar Berendei is the legendary Tsar of the Russian folk-tales. Cf. Rimsky-Korsakov's opera *The Snow Maiden*.

built in the form of a cross on the banks of the Trubejh river and the shore of Lake Pleshcheyevo. No doubt there had been many a time when the people had been glad to gather there out of harm's way. But now the place was almost deserted, the clappers were taken out of the bells, and behind the abbot's fishpond, about the size of a Noah's Ark, the only signs of life were a couple of goats belonging to the local historian, who was the director of the folk museum, and his assistant's little daughter Galya running round with them.

From the little belfry we had a bird's-eye view of all the life outside the walls, the many churches and monasteries of the old town, and between them the throngs of village people up for the market. Below us was a forest of churches; there seemed scarcely enough room to move between them. One of them— the Church of the Forty Martyrs—stands at the point where the Trubejh river empties into the lake, and it is dedicated to the memory of forty martyrs who were drowned in the lake at one time. Another, on the opposite side of the river, is known as the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin, because, according to the fishermen, it serves as a look-out post for the famous Pereslavl herring fishery. Farther on, at the summit of a slight rise, there is another sanctuary, Fyodor-on-the-hill.

It was strange to us, coming from the marshes streaked with tiny rivers, where we had already witnessed the Spring of the Waters, to see Lake Pleshcheyevo still lying like a winter field. It was just possible for the naked eye to pick out the jagged edge of the forest surrounding it, and just possible to realize that the whole of this enormous white plain was the frozen lake.

To the left of Goritski was the white palace in memory of Peter the Great, and of the cradle of the Russian Navy; on the far side the Alexandrov heights, with its ancient buried monastery, named in honour of Alexander Nyevski, the Prince of Pereslavl. The local people, however, called it Yarila's Bald Patch.[1]

I had all this information from the local historian. He had given the whole of his life to the study of his native Pereslavl province, and he kept in all its purity the true 'o' sound of the Vladimir dialect.

'I am the seventh holder of the post here,' he told me in his

[1] Yarila—the god of Spring.

dialect. 'The first was Shut, the fool; hence you have Shutov's glade, Shutov's valley, and one of the castle towers is called Shutov's tower.'

Shut, the fool, later the Finnish pagan priest, then many other things, and finally archbishop . . . I well remembered Shut, especially when the historian spoke about a certain village called Voskresenskiye (Resurrection), but which the locals called the Devil's Village.

'Perhaps this was why', I thought, 'Shut, the fool, eventually became the Devil. In the struggle between the cheerful Yarila, or fool, and the early Church, the holy fathers preached the miracle of the Resurrection, and one miracle evoked another, till the happy, good-natured Yarila was transformed into the mystic, malicious Devil.'

All the monasteries and churches of historical importance in the district belonged to the museum, together with Peter the Great's galley and Yarila's Bald Patch.

'What a museum!' I remarked. 'From Yarila to Peter I . . .'

'And later still,' said the historian. 'If you like I'll show you round the buildings of Catherine's time and Elisabeth's.'

Some visitors now arrived to look over the museum, and we joined them on their tour of the Church of the Assumption.

He was a remarkable fellow, the historian, a real connoisseur of the lore of Pereslavl. What was even more important, he was a Greater Russian; that is, he was able to paint with a broad brush, yet if the need arose, he could also thread his way along the narrowest of paths.

Noticing that not all his listeners were interested in his descriptions of the ikons of Catherine's time or in the Elisabethan baroque, but were letting their attention wander to the blue sky outside, he began to tell them about Bishop Gennadia Krotinsky, who died of cholera and was buried in the church. The tomb on the floor of the sanctuary was provided with a grating, behind which could be seen a brocaded hanging. The monks used to pull the hanging aside and show the believers the holy relics. But now anyone could see for themselves that the remains were strewn about the bottom of a tin—a caramel tin, and they had not even taken the trouble to remove the label—'Ena Assortment'.

One of the visitors, who had shown himself completely indifferent to the art of Catharine and Elisabeth, could not even raise

a smile at the 'Ena Assortment'. Mikhail Ivanovitch led this morose individual over to a fresco showing Lazarus and the rich merchant.

'There you are,' he said, 'the *bourgeoisie* roasts in hell fire, while the proletariat, as you see, is received in Abraham's bosom.'

At this the visitor perked up a little and remarked:

'You'll see that happen before very long.'

'My dear young man,' replied the historian, 'it happened years and years ago.'

When we came out of the church and looked over the wall down at the lake, we noticed that to-day, the warmest day we had had this year, there was a thin blue strip of water between the ice and the shore, and the cranes were circling and gabbling overhead.

THE RETURN OF THE KESTRELS

In the courtyard of the museum the speckled butterflies were enjoying the warm sunshine. This was a red-letter day for Serge Sergeyitch the entomologist, for he had noticed some tiny beetles climbing about on the inner walls. These beetles were a great nuisance in the museum itself, so he collected some dry leaves in a small bag, sifted them out, and we began to study these nuisances through a magnifying glass.

'Serge Sergeyitch,' I asked, 'among the sixty thousand beetles you have collected, have you any particular favourite, one that started it all?'

He did not seem to understand what I was driving at, so I repeated my question:

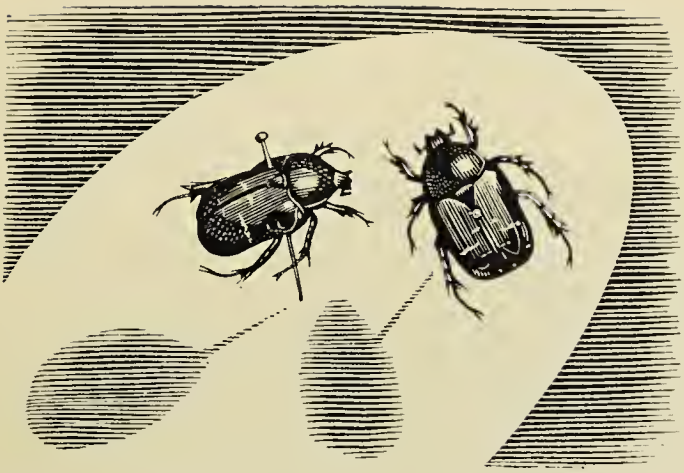
'Have you got a favourite beetle?'

He considered this for some time.

'One you like personally,' I added.

'Yes,' he replied with some animation, 'but it's not any particular beetle, but a species.'

'Well, well, well; a species, eh?' The very reason I was asking him these questions was to get him away from his species, if possible, and try and make him remember one particular beetle



which, no doubt, had once enchanted him with the beauty of the world in the depths of his despair, and had saved his life. But when you get to like a whole species . . .

'Well, anyhow, what species do you like the best?'

The ponderous, hairy, beetle-like, learned, honourable, and likeable Serge Sergeyitch beamed and answered:

'Bronze-beetles.'[1]

So we went into his study and contemplated his bronze-beetles, several thousands of them in glass cases, mounted on card, and each one with its label and detailed description.

I listened carefully to his lecture on beetles, but this only made me more anxious than ever to hear about the very first bronze-beetle he had ever met, and elucidate the subtle personal circumstances which had attracted Serge Sergevitch to the hobby of sticking pins through his favourites.

As for me, my entire life has been spent in the search for a steady, scientific bronze-beetle such as this, and, having found it, to occupy myself with it to the end of my days. There have been occasions when I seemed to reach that stage; but for some reason I soon tire of it, and soon exhaust its charm and sweetness, so that it seems empty and without savour, and finally I reject it. Perhaps this is the reason I have never been able to specialize, unless you count the desire to note down my observations of life as a kind of specialization.

In about an hour I extracted all I could of note from Serge Sergeyitch's bronze-beetles, and my attention wandered again in

[1] *Cetonia aurata.*

search of something new. I looked up and noticed the kestrels hovering in the sky, and saw that the blue ribbon round the edge of the lake was growing still wider. I had been told that if the ice melted like this, in a week or so they would be starting the pike-fishing in the Pereslavl lake. I made up my mind to call together the committee of the museum, and make a report on the Sokolniki research station; and I suggested that a similar organization should be set up at Pereslavl.

'The only point is, however,' I said, 'that at Sokolniki,[1] near Moscow, there is comparatively little material to work on, so that the general tone of the studies there could be described as "micro-tone", a micro-climate, a small area of preserved woods, and the best work they have done there has been on the mosquito. Here, on the other hand, the conditions are such as could be called "macro-tone"; the enormous lake and the unlimited forest. It would be a fine idea to organize a research station here with a geographical department, in close association with Sokolniki; let them do the "micro" work, and us the "macro".'

Opinion was divided; the historian and I were on the side of the 'macro', and we managed to persuade the chairman of the district education committee to agree with us, while Serge Sergeyitch and the president of the local education committee were in opposition. The meteorologist, a thin anaemic fellow, was inclined to waver.

Before the debate ended and the votes were taken, I remarked:

'Remember that the same laws apply in a cup of tea as on Lake Pleshcheyevo, but a storm in a teacup is not quite the same thing as a storm on the lake. . . .'

At this point Serge Sergeyitch, probably in his anxiety to refute this observation, lifted his arm and spilt a cup of hot tea into the meteorologist's lap. He jumped up and went out of the room. Soon afterwards he returned, and we asked anxiously:

'Are you all right?'

'Yes,' he replied calmly. 'You can be "macro" or "micro", just as you like, but I'm just "mokro" (wet).'

The committee decided: (1) the question of the aims and purpose of the research station be left until the holidays, when the representatives from Sokolniki can give us their advice; and

[1] Sokolniki was the original station of the 'Young Naturalists' movement, which later spread over the whole of the U.S.S.R.

(2) the director of the observation post be accommodated in the palace at Botik in four rooms on the south side of the courtyard.

THE FLIGHT OF THE SWANS

It had been fine since dawn, the morning frost soon disappeared, and towards midday it was tiring to walk in an overcoat. The gulls had risen earlier than I, and flew screaming over the weed-covered ponds in the monastery grounds.

I walked along the shore of the lake to Botik, to see if I could come to some arrangement about my lodgings there. The lake had two shores: the old one, high and channelled into ravines, and the new one, low-lying, marshy, and edged with sand. The ravines (ovragi) were here known by the old term 'vrag'; the first after leaving Goritsa was called Shutov-vrag, then a narrow river ran through Veskovo village; after Veskovo-vrag I came to Voznesenski and Knyazyik Hill, and finally Gremyachaya Hill with its spring. Here on Gremyachaya Hill were preserved the remains of Peter the Great's galley (botik), like holy relics. For this reason the whole settlement was known as Botik.

I hardly had time to reach Gremyachaya Hill and have a look round before Nadyejhda Pavlovna, the caretaker's wife, began to speak of Peter; how he was a great lover of the water, and how one day, seeing Lake Pleshcheyevo from a distance, he turned his horse's head and rode straight through the ripe corn to the shore. An old woman in the village of Veskovo happened to catch sight of the cavalcade riding through the cornfield, and came out of her cottage at once and began to call them all the names she could lay her tongue to. Peter appeared to be highly amused at this, and afterwards he freely compensated the villagers for the damaged rye, and even summoned one or two of them to serve on his 'duma', or council. From that day to this there have been Dumnovs in the village; the caretaker himself, Ivan Akimitch, was a Dumnov, showing that one of his forebears had served on Peter's duma.

I paid a visit to the shed where the sole surviving relic of Peter's great fleet is preserved, and remembered how Peter

himself, revisiting the place after thirty years' absence, had been annoyed at the way his fleet had been left to rot, and there and then issued his terrible 'ukase' to the Governor of Pereslavl. At first, of course, this resulted in something being done, but after this the boats were again left without attention, passing from one private owner of the property to another. At length the Tsar Nicholas I came down heavily on the local Vladimir gentry, forced them to buy the only remaining boat, built a small palace there with a triumphal arch and erected a monument, with an inscription taken from Peter's 'ukase'.

'Upon you, the Governor of Pereslavl, is laid the solemn obligation to preserve the remains of the ships, yachts, and galleys of the fleet, and if you neglect this, it will be held against you and your descendants after you, as disobedience to my ukase.'

Impressed by Peter's words, I walked over to the summit of the Gremyachaya Hill and looked down on the lake, the cradle of the Russian fleet. That day the ring of water round the shore shone clearer still, under the setting sun. From far overhead a particularly harmonious sound came to my ears; the swans were flying high across the lake.

In the palace we managed to find some trestles and boards, out of which we made beds and tables for ourselves. Then we gave the whole place a good clean-out, and we were charmed by the surge of the trees in the forest—a sound which is usually heard only in the deepest ravines, yet we heard it through the six-foot windows of the palace. There was one drawback: we could not find an opening anywhere for the chimney of our samovar, so we had to light it in the porch. As I was putting it on, I heard the cry of the blackcock within a hundred paces of the doorway, and when I went down into the cellar for some kindling out jumped a lively young grey hare and ran off.

We drank our tea, listening with delight to the creak and the surge of the forest.

THE RETURN OF THE GAME BIRDS

The snow was falling in thick, wet flakes. I was walking through the swampy meadow on the shore of the lake to Ribaka (Fisherman's town). The gulls were nesting already; they swept across my path with their shrill cries so close that I could not help flinching and blinking my eyes. On the broad creek between the ice and the shore near Ribaka there was an unusually excited fluttering of wings, and a swan, unnoticed before on the wet snow, flew up just in front of me. Extending its long neck, just like a duck, only bigger and whiter, it flew across the lake and was hidden among the ice-packs. Now and then a pair of teal or mallard cruised along the edge of the water. On the opposite side of the path, not far from where the swan had been hiding behind the dunes, I flushed some geese; the leader flew on ahead, and four others followed close behind. In their alarm they only flew a short distance and settled on the ice itself. Lapwings were rummaging in the mud at the edge of the lake. The game-birds had returned in force.

Under the cliff on the sandbank opposite Gremyachaya spring a small hut, built of pine shingles, had sprung up in the night. When I got home I was told that it had been put up by the miller —our miller of the Gremyachaya mill—and that he had been up to ask me not to interfere with his sport, and promised to call again and see me.

'He is a very civil young man,' I was told, 'and they say he is one of the gentry.'

Shortly after the young man himself arrived, tall, with expressive eyes, and looking more like a student than a miller.

'Do you know anything about guns?' he asked, after a few words of greeting, and going into the kitchen, brought out a gun.

'That's a blunderbuss,' I said, 'that's not a gun.'

'Never mind, I'm buying myself a proper breech-loader very soon. One of the peasants owes me forty poods[1] of corn, and when I get it I'm going to buy myself a gun and a boat. I went to the grammar school—I finished in the fifth class.'

'Are you living by yourself?'

'No, there's the wife and one child. I get two pounds in every pood, in all, about ten poods a month. Could you give me any idea where I can find plenty of game?'

'The game-birds have returned in full force on Lake Pleshcheyevo; whatever you like—swans, geese, duck of all kinds.'

'I want to find a spot where up to now the foot of man has never trod,' and without waiting for an answer, he continued: 'Do you like human beings?'

'I take an interest in them from time to time.'

'I hate them. Especially our country people; sly, nasty, and cruel.'

'They vary, of course. . . .'

'No, they're all alike. What does the word "belles-lettres" mean?'

I explained as best I could.

'In that case let me tell you the story of how I got married.'

'No, if you don't mind. I'm rather tired, and want to go to bed. Don't you?'

'No, not a bit. I'm going home to read Maxim Gorky. The mill runs itself, you see; I'm reading, and it goes on working all the time. And the wife does a bit of sewing in the town.'

He took his leave, very polite, and a trifle gloomy; my first acquaintance in Botik. Just as he left, the town stove-builder[2] came in to pay his respects. A morose man with the features of an ascetic. I gathered that he was a very religious man.

'What a lot of churches there are in your town!' I remarked.

[1] 1 pood = 40 lb.

[2] In Russia the stove-builder is a mason or bricklayer who specializes in erecting stoves. In the country districts the stove and the foundations are usually the only parts of the house which are not of wood.

'Yet they are still a long way from God.'

'You don't mean to say there is no God?'

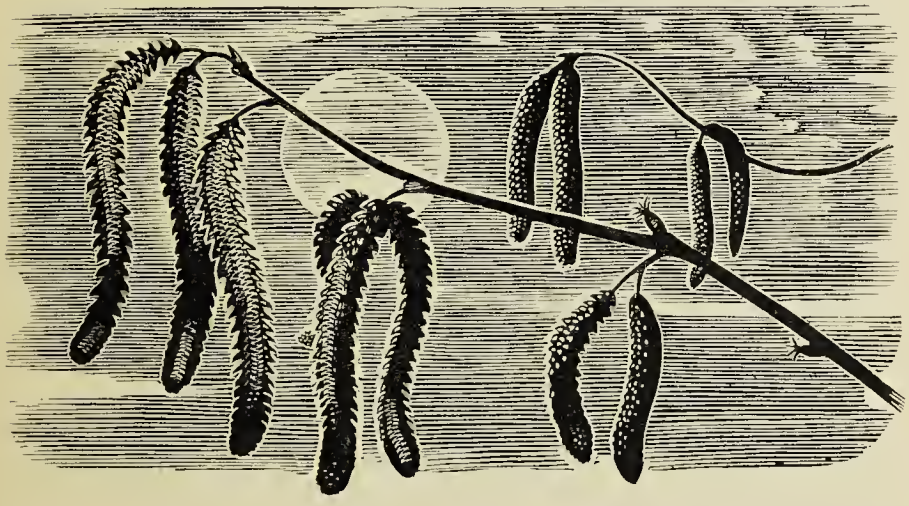
'Maybe there is, somewhere or other, but he is as far above us as we are above the midges.'

'You believe in science, I suppose?'

'The only true religion is socialism.'

This was how we discussed our stove with the stove-builder. Remembering my conversation with the miller, I asked him who the young man was.

'A nephew three times removed of our former district Governor.'



THE FLOWERING OF THE HAZEL

THE floor of the woods was a patchwork of black and white; in the ravines the spring waters murmured, and above them, warmed by the sun, the hazel hung her golden catkins. Yarik made his first point by ear. He thought it was a blackcock calling; actually it was the water under his very feet gurgling like the '*tok-tok*' of the bird. She called at last from some distance away, and when we flushed her, she had four chicks with her. Our trees were never silent; day and night the wind could be heard surging through them, even when the windows were shut tight. I loved it: it was as dear to me as my own

kindred, and although I would rather not speak of it, in the same way the spring seemed to surge through my heart. . . .

The edge of the lake opposite Botik was still frozen almost solid, but the pike could come close to the shore through the runnels under the ice. Our caretaker Dumnov stood there with his fish-spear, like Father Neptune; farther along were the two well-known pike-fishers, the brothers Komissarov; then the sacristan, and so on all along the shore, from our Veskoi bank to Nadgorod, from Onoi to Zazarye—all like Father Neptunes in a circle.

I was told that the pike came out between first light and sunrise, at nine in the morning, at noon, at five in the afternoon, and at sunset. I mentioned that when the lake at Tsaritsyn was cleaned out they caught a pike scaling three poods, and found inside it a gold ring belonging to Boris Godunov. I asked if there were pike like that in Lake Pleshcheyevo.

'Yes,' they said, 'but the lake is so deep that a pike that size would never come out. But there's a roach in there with a gold ring inside it thrown in by Peter I. . . .'

'Has anybody caught a pike to-day?'

'They haven't come out yet, but they've caught several "milkmen".'

The male fish are known as 'milkmen'; small fry compared with the great she-pike.

The miller called to ask me to join him in duck-shooting with a decoy. Somehow I couldn't imagine his duck calling, so I refused. He was covered with mud from head to foot, and I remarked that it looked bad for a former representative of the gentry to go about in such a filthy state.

'Business is business,' he replied.

'But your workman,' I said, indicating his foreman, 'your workman is as clean as a new pin!'

The young fellow laughed, and at once informed me that he had been summoned that day before the district executive committee, and that when he paid them a visit he never bothered to wash, and sometimes made himself dirtier than he need be, to give them the impression that he was one of the workers.

Towards evening it began to rain.

As the windows had only single frames, and the forest was so

close to the house, at night it was like sleeping in a forest hut, reflecting the outside world as in a mirror. The creak and the surge of the trees invaded my dreams; as if I had fallen into a deep ravine in the forest. Suddenly I heard the sharp call of a duck and, without any interval between sleeping and waking, realized that this must be the miller's decoy. Then I heard her frantic 'Ach! Ach!' that meant she had seen the drake. I jumped out of bed; as I was running to the door, the drake had clearly spotted the duck, and I hardly had time to pick up my gun when I heard a shot. In the semi-darkness the decoy under the Gremyachaya cliffs was invisible, I could only see the hut itself.

While the samovar was warming up, the miller shot two more drakes.

After a cup of tea, when, by my reckoning, the duck-shooting would be over, I walked down to the mill. As soon as I saw the miller's home I began to call him 'Robinson',[1] for the cottage was filthy inside, broken-down and dilapidated, and the sky could be seen through the holes in the roof. 'Robinson' himself sat by a glowing cauldron plucking a duck, and the other sportsmen sat by his side peeling potatoes. The leading spirit amongst them, one Yejhka, was talking about drakes; how some are bluish, others yellowish; of snipe, large and small; that mallard are so obviously different from one another that you might almost say that one mallard is never quite like the next, just like human beings; and so, for that matter, are hares. . . .

Who were these men? Insignificant clerks and tradesmen, reckoned in the town as little more than half-civilized; yet they were born observers and naturalists, and what is more, not sentimental town-dwellers or bookworms, getting their ideas from Rousseau or Tolstoy—in such as these is preserved a real feeling for nature. It was people like these I should have to collaborate with in my studies of the wild life of the district. I spoke of this, and there and then we made a bargain not to shoot any nesting birds in the neighbourhood of Botik, nor hares. . . .

Speaking of hares, I told them how I had surprised one in my cellar at Botik.

'A grey hare?' asked Yejhka, and when I confirmed this he said:

[1] The allusion is to *Swiss Family Robinson*, a popular book in Russia.

'There are always a few hares in Botik, and even in Pereslavl itself. Do you know K.'s house? No? Do you know M.? No? You don't know where that is? Which parts of Pereslavl do you know?'

I told him I knew the older parts fairly well; the twelfth-century cathedral, the ruins of the water-mill, the potteries, where the Danilov monastery stands now, and the Tokhtamisha[1] monument. . . .

'You know the Tokhtamisha monument? Well, just opposite there is a wooden house with a large garden. One autumn a grey hare made itself at home in this garden; we found it had been nibbling at the cabbage-stumps. When the first snow fell we set the dogs on it.'

Yejhka gave us a detailed account of the chase this tireless hare led them through various historical places: out of the town itself up to Botik, along the Pereslavl lake as far as the well-known Alexandrov hills, where excavations had revealed the site of a pagan Slavonic temple, then back again to the town along Sovietsky Street and through the castle, where it doubled back through some iron railings, and, to save itself from some boys playing there, dashed straight across through the open door of the police headquarters. Some time before this the sportsmen, having lost their hare, whistled up the dogs, put them back on the leash, and made for home, but finding the fresh tracks on Sovietsky Street, set the dogs on the trail again. They hadn't far to go; the trail led straight to the police-station, and the entire pack in full cry tore into the building, with their owners after them. But by this time the policemen had not only caught the hare, but had raffled it between themselves. Refusing to give up the hare, they turned the sportsmen out and the two sides nearly came to blows. The sportsmen, forced to retire empty-handed, left the station with dire threats against the police: 'Wait till we get you in the forest; we'll tear you limb from limb!'

When I got back home, I made up my mind to write this story down; it was interesting, because I had never heard of chasing a hare through a town before, and its flight through so many places of historical interest seemed particularly curious. Unfortunately, just as I got the hare through the railings, my memory

[1] Tokhtamisha—the Khan of the Tartars who captured and burned Moscow in 1382.

failed; so, to put the matter right, I went over to the miller's cottage again. This time (Robinson) was alone.

'Do you remember where it was the hare got through the railings?

'Robinson' replied:

'At the entrance to the square in front of the Church of the Holy Ghost; there's an enclosure there with some iron railings round it.'

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT

The mother of my decoy had been an ordinary domestic Russian duck, but a wild drake had paid her a visit or two, and the ducklings were the living image of their father. I picked out the one with the loudest voice and used her to attract the drakes to my hide. Innumerable swells in their nuptial plumage were enticed to their doom by her incessant calling. A sportsman as a rule is merciless, yet on one occasion when a wild drake replied to her call, I hadn't the heart to shoot him.

It was very early one spring morning. I went out into the woods for some shooting, and taking my chatterbox out of her basket, I tied a long string to her leg with a weight at the end, set her on the waters of the little creek, and went across to my hide on the opposite bank, and watched her through a narrow opening in the rushes.

I had not been waiting long before a pair of mallard flew over; the grey duck leading, and after her the drake in his courting garb. Suddenly another pair met them from the opposite direction. The two pairs had just passed one another when a sparrow-hawk swooped down on the duck of the second pair, and there was a terrific mix-up. The hawk started to hover, while the duck he had attacked threw herself down and hid in the thicket. Then the hawk, nonplussed at the failure of his assault, flew slowly away under the blue-grey clouds. The drake of the second pair, gathering his wits together after the hawk's descent, flew round in narrow circles, but nowhere could he see his duck. Some distance away the original pair continued their flight. Thinking, no doubt, that this was his duck pursued by a stranger, he set off after them and began to overtake them.

The lost duck soon recovered from her fright and came out of the thicket along the reach and began to call. This set up a duel of voices between my decoy and the wild bird, and although the decoy nearly tore herself apart in her efforts to gain the mastery, the wild bird won easily, and a passing drake accepted her invitation.

After a wide circular flight the original pair returned, still followed by the bereaved drake. Could he still be thinking that the drake he was following in this way was, after all, his own duck being wooed by another?

His own duck swam off down the creek, silent, and preening herself complacently, and my decoy took her chance, in the absence of her rival, to attract him. And he heard her. . . . Is it true, then, that when they are in love it doesn't make much difference which duck it is, so long as it is a duck? And, since time goes so much faster for them than it does for us, a few moments of separation from their beloved would seem to them equal to ten years of our unrequited passion? So that after his apparently hopeless quest for his duck, as soon as he heard the voice of another one, he recognized it as that of his own lost one, since really he was in love with the whole race of ducks?

He threw himself down so urgently upon my decoy that he gave me no chance to take aim. Afterwards he began to make the male's customary circles of gratification round her in the water. I could have shot him easily, but I remembered my own hot youth, when all the world seemed to be in love, and I couldn't find it in my heart to fire.

THE RISING OF THE SAP IN THE BIRCHES

I CUT off a very thin twig of birch to make myself a pipe-cleaner. A drop of sap collected at the gash and sparkled in the sunlight. The forest was a patchwork of snow and light-blue puddles, and very warm at midday. Looking round, I decided that the woodcock might easily arrive to-day after their migration, and in the afternoon I went over to Solomidino to ask the old wildfowler Mikhail Ivanovitch Mineyev to show me the

best place to wait for their return. From his appearance no one would have thought that this Mikhail was a grandfather, although he could well remember the Tsar Alexander II, and his grandson, a co-operative farmer, had just recently had another little boy. I found Mikhail at last after a long search, for although he had four sons, he had no home of his own, and lived —a proletarianized chief of his clan, a village King Lear—first at one son's, and then at another's. He had already fallen out with two of them, and had now gone over to a third.

I heard all about this from various informants as I looked for his present home, and later, as we waited for nightfall in the cottage, I was told a good deal more by the old man himself. But as he continued his story as we walked together to the place where we would see the birds' arrival, I gave up listening altogether and wondered how best I might get rid of him. However, a word here and there reached my ears, and in sheer politeness I was forced to answer more or less at random.

'Then the magistrate awarded him the cow.'

'Is that so?' I said. 'He gave him his cow back, eh?'

'That's the gospel truth. He gave him the cow.'

The old man caught me by the sleeve and stopped me, and waited in tense silence for my comment on this. What could I say? Finally my tongue answered of its own accord:

'Good gracious!'

He let go of my sleeve, walked on, and added:

'Then I let my son go, just as I let go of your sleeve, and went to live with another.'

At this point I heard the usual 'sveese-sveese' of a duck, but the old man's chatter prevented me from shooting.

'Look!' I said. 'Down at your place they've got the samovar on by now. You go and have your tea.'

'All right,' he said. 'I shall have to go now, but not to drink tea. Tea! They've got some logs down there they want shifting, and I have to go and help them.'

'Off you go, then.'

'And you talk about drinking tea! Logs . . .'

He laughed and walked back a short distance, then stopped, turned, and repeated:

'Great big logs! . . .'

I was thinking at the time that his son, in all probability, was

working under great pressure, and having tremendous difficulty in making both ends meet; yet here was this old man finding plenty of time to go shooting and making the most of the re-awakening of nature and wild life. I said:

'You're a cunning old rogue!'

He seemed very pleased at this remark, and strode up to me again and winked cheerfully:

'That's true enough. They don't come on me for their produce levies and fines, and all that sort of thing. *They* have to deal with that. . . .'

I thought of the cow, that truly sacred and inviolable property of the peasant, and tried to imagine what it would mean if some scoundrel were to steal and even kill it, and if its owner should happen to kill the thief, then the judge would naturally let the peasant go free. For the cow is a necessity for the land-worker; in a sense it is public property; with its manure it enriches the soil and feeds the worker with its milk. I was seeking in my *spiritual* activities the equivalent of something like this, and suddenly the cow appeared to me as a measure of cultural values, such as are created by writers, poets, scholars, and artists. I carefully divided them into two groups, those with cows and the useless, cowless ones.

But the old man was still standing there in my way.

This time I didn't let the game get away. I fired from both barrels, without taking aim, at a bird flying hurriedly past; it looked like a large drake chasing a duck. He crashed down through the birches and fell on the still virgin carpet of snow beneath them.

'Go on, go on!' I said to the old man. 'Go and have your tea.'

'All right,' he replied. 'I'll go and have my tea, and go shooting when I want to—but all you can hear from *them* is produce-levies and fines, and all that.'

Contrary to all my expectation and former experience, the silence when the old man left me was not that deep silence full of the power of new life: this silence was dead. A solitary thrush sang orphan-like over the whole forest, and the drop of birch-sap from the torn-off branch sparkled in the sunlight. I was afraid of it; the harmony was broken, and the forest seemed to me as terrifying as when it brings a nameless fear to superstitious men;

so terrifying that I lost control of myself and began to swear and shoot at trees or anything else in my way. . . . Suddenly I heard quarrelling voices from a group of men approaching down the clearing, but when they came closer I recognized Robinson and Yejhka, and realized that they were the morning hunters returning from the marshes.

'What are you squabbling about?' I asked, when they came up.

'We were saying that this Robinson was lying,' replied Yejhka. 'What he told you this morning was all lies.'

'No it wasn't,' said Robinson. 'The hare could easily have got through the railings round the Church of the Holy Ghost.'

'How do you know? You weren't there yourself, and those railings are so close you can't put a finger between them. I tell you he came out through the barbed wire. . . .'

The wildfowlers were in two minds about the woodcock: some said it was too early yet; others, that the woodcock were already here, but the early morning was too cold for them to 'flight'; while a third said that in the south everything was frozen up and they were sure they hadn't arrived yet.

'What about the snipe?' I asked.

'The snipe are here.'

'Have you heard the curlew?'

'Yes.'

'Strange, the woodcock not here yet!'

'Most likely they're frozen up.'

THE OLD SHE-PIKE

VERY late one evening I was returning to the village on foot from a visit to the town. At this time I could always count on a lift from a timber-haulier going home, and I was not disappointed. A young haulier, slightly tipsy after a hard day's work, offered me a lift. As was the custom on such occasions, I refused at first, but when he insisted I settled myself on the sledge. The young man gave me his name: Ivan Bazunov from Vyeslyeva.

'The well-known pike-fisher?' I asked.

'A bit of an expert, perhaps, in my own way,' he replied. 'May I ask your name?'

I told him.

'Well, Mikhail Mikhailovitch,' he said, 'have you any special bee in your bonnet?'

'Yes, my dear Bazunov. Have you not heard that I am a sportsman?'

'So it's you, is it? Of course I've heard of you. . . . Very pleased to meet you! A sportsman, eh? Well, well, well! And I too, as far as pike-fishing is concerned. That's the university where I studied, in a way. You see what I mean?'

'Quite.'

'Very well. I'll explain it all to you this minute, I think you'll understand. I am a pike-fisher; that's the bee in my bonnet. I go out after the pike; but take, for example, human beings. Sometimes you would like to console yourself with your lady-love in broad daylight, but it isn't done, people would see, it is impossible. Have you ever felt like that, Mikhail Mikhailovitch?'

'It happens to all of us at times,' I replied.

'Then you agree about human beings. But let me tell you this —it's just the same with other living creatures—pike, for example. The roe begins to swell, but nothing can be done about it. Just as the night time for human beings, so the pike has her own proper and lawful time for love.'

'I know,' I said. 'The mating of the pike occurs during the first thaw.'

'Quite true. When the first currents begin to flow, and the lake begins to free itself, the she-pike goes swimming against the current, and there and then I throw up everything and wait at the edge of the flow. . . .'

Bazunov went on at great length to relate how his hobby got him into trouble with his wife, and how he left her to go after his fish. Finally we arrived at my gate, but he would not let me go in, pressing me to hear his story to the end.

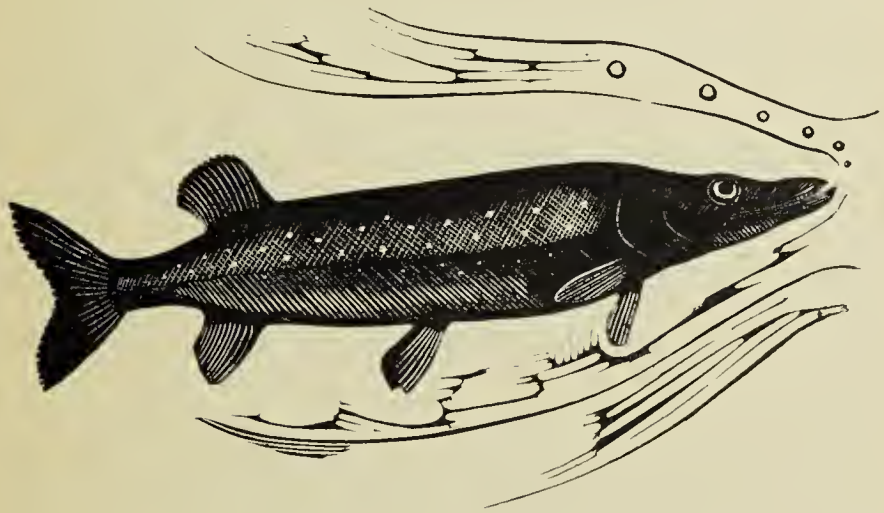
'The sun warms you up,' he continued, 'and a man begins to think about a family—like the pike, her spawn gets the better of her. She pushes herself into a narrow crevice where the water is shallow, and the "milkmen" whiten her over. I have seen as many as seven at a time fussing round a large old pike, but she is always underneath, and those who don't know this always aim

their harpoons at the "milkmen", while the pike herself, the largest of all, gets clear away. But I know how it's done, and I plunge my spear down well below the "milkmen", and that's why I'm supposed to be an expert.'

After hearing this, I told a story about an encounter with a pike that I had been unable to understand at the time. One evening in July I had been walking by the lake, and noticed what appeared to be a man's hand appearing on the surface, then sinking out of sight, and then appearing again. It looked very much as if the waves were lapping a corpse. I walked farther out along a sandbank, and realized that it was not a man's hand, as I had thought, but a large fish. I killed it with a shot from my gun; but the flesh was very tough—very likely an old fish.

'Now you say,' I continued, 'that the pike, like man, knows her proper time, and comes out in early spring; but this was in the middle of summer! How do you account for that?'

'I'll tell you,' said Bazunov. 'On a warm sunny day the pike sometimes comes to the surface; for she too, like human beings, has her memories. I'm sure of it; I'm an expert. After all, an old woman will often play the fool worse than a young one. She remembers her youthful loves. I know. I'm an expert.'



PIKE-FISHING

The weather settled down to warm, almost hot days, but there were moonlit nights with such heavy frosts that the strip of water at the edge of the lake was frozen inches deep. This strip by now was like a wide, blue river, and the pack ice remained only in the inlets. But from Usolya to Pereslavl the folks were still sledging across the ice on market days.

The pike-fishing had begun, but the fishermen only had the morning for it; at night the water was frozen, and even if they did come across a pike it was impossible to get near enough to it with the harpoon owing to the noise. However, they would take up their positions in the morning, standing motionless some distance apart, with their harpoons raised to strike. In the evening there were lights all round the shore; they stood on guard, and in the beam of the lantern waded knee-deep between the ice and the shore, one carrying the hod and showing the light, and the other two with harpoons raised. Hour after hour they waited for the fish to emerge.

I tried several times to get near enough to them to talk, but obviously this was not to their liking, and they even moved away when they saw me approaching. Then I tried standing motionless myself with my gun, but soon this became unbearably dull, and I couldn't guess where they found the patience to stand so still. At length I began to grasp it—when one of them saw a fish and started to follow it with raised harpoon, all the others watched him closely; clearly it was not altogether the hope of getting a pike themselves, as the chance that some one else might.

Towards evening, when it became nearly dark, and one by one they went home to get the lanterns ready, the circular post from fisherman to fisherman round the lake brought the news of the day.

To-day's news was that at the mouth of the Trubejh river a pike weighing forty-two pounds had been killed. The fisherman sat by his stake and spotted an enormous fish. Striking at like it a sea-eagle, he failed to kill it, but merely embedded his harpoon in her body, like the claws of the eagle. The fish struggled and

pulled the fisherman into the ice-cold water, but without letting go of his fish-spear, he sank under the surface, came up again near the ice, jumped out, and pulled the dead fish out after him.

In the town itself somebody had thrown a harpoon from the pier at a large pike, climbed down after it and dashed into the water, but the fish got away, harpoon and all.

In the semi-darkness Dumnov, one of the family of those who had sat on Peter's duma, chose a shallow spot away from everybody else, and threw a log across from the bank to the ice, and crossed over on it. From time to time he could see, under the ice, a monstrous head. . . .

We all watched as Dumnov stood there with his spear raised; it looked as if he were afraid to strike, in case the pike should pull him under the water.

On the shore they laughed and jeered at him, but Dumnov sent for a bottle of vodka, drank it in one gulp, and waited. . . .

Suddenly the doubts about Dumnov's pike were set at rest; they could all see the enormous head under the ice, twisting back and forth. Dumnov sent for another bottle.

After the second bottle the monstrous head appeared again. Dumnov struck, and struck accurately—the fish was pinned to the bottom. But what would he do next, for only a short end of the long harpoon was left above the water? A pike that size couldn't be pulled out with the harpoon alone, and it couldn't be reached by hand. What could he do? But Dumnov knew what he was doing when he drank his two bottles of vodka; now he was knee-deep in the icy water, standing on the pike's back. Then he completely disappeared under the ice, and sticking his fingers in the eyes of the fish, reappeared and pulled his quarry to the shore. They all saw it was a huge fish, and with her a milkman of about ten pounds.

Dumnov threw her down into a trench, where she suddenly came to life again—and what a fish! She shook her tail and the ten-pound milkman flew off and landed about fifty paces away!

He slung his belt round her under her gills and lifted her up so that the head was level with his shoulders, while the tail dragged along the ground. As he walked through the village the women gathered round. Soon the whole village was round him, and word went out: 'Dumnov has killed a pike he can hardly get home with!'

So the news went round the lake, from Veskoi to Nadgorod, from Nadgorod to Onoi and Zazarye, through Uryev and Usolya—Dumnov of Veskoi has killed a sixty-pound pike with a ten-pound milkman.

THE STIRRING OF THE FROGS

On one occasion we stayed in the hide all night with the decoy ducks. Towards dawn there was a very severe frost; I was completely benumbed by the cold and walked about all the following day like someone in a trance. Late in the evening I started to shiver, and spent the next day in bed, feeling as if I were completely detached from the fight my body was making with life and death. At dawn on the third day I dreamed I saw the many-coloured shore of Lake Pleshcheyevo and the white gulls riding on the ice in the blue water. When I awoke it was exactly as I had seen it in the dream. And how beautiful those white gulls looked on the blue water, and how many other lovely things would still be there for me; I shall even yet see the lake completely free from ice and the earth covered with green growing things; I shall greet the silver birches in their spring dresses, and hear the first rustle of the green leaves.

For some reason the trees had stopped their surge and creaking. Why was this? In its place I heard a burst of wonderful song.

'Doesn't that sound like a chaffinch?'

I was told it had been much warmer since last evening, they had already heard the light peal of distant thunder.

Feeling very weak after the battle between life and death, but happy over my release, I got out of bed and saw through the open window that the entire lawn in front of the house was covered with little birds: finches, all sorts of song thrushes, grey and black, and many Siberian thrushes; they ran round the lawn in flocks, fluttering here and there and bathing in the larger puddles. The singing birds had returned from their migration.

Our dogs, tied up under the trees, suddenly started to bark, and stared in a rather stupid manner at something on the ground.

'Look what the thunder has fetched out,' said Dumnov, and pointed to the spot the dogs were staring at.

With his wet back gleaming in the sun, a frog jumped straight towards one of the dogs, but before he could be seized, he turned and made for the larger pool.

The frogs were stirring, and it seemed as if the thunder had something to do with this; the life of the frog in some way seems to be connected with the thunder—there is a peal, and the frogs stir themselves, jumping along in pairs, their wet backs gleaming in the sun, and always in the same direction, towards the larger pool. I made my way to it; they all came to the surface to have a look at me—how terribly inquisitive they were!

What a vast number of insects were flying in the sun, and what a throng of birds there was on the lawn! But to-day, coming from a sick-bed, I could not be bothered with their names. To-day I was feeling the life of nature as a whole; I had no time to fuss over names and species. With all these flying, swimming,

and running things I felt my kinship; for each one my spirit had its memory-image, flowing through my blood for millions of years; all this was a part of me, and all I had to do was look—and I should know.

To-day, arising from my feeling for life, my thoughts arranged themselves simply and clearly; for a short time I had been set aside from life by illness; I had lost something, but I had now come back to life. So a million years ago we had lost our wings, as fine as those of a gull, and because this had been such a long time ago, we were now so fond of them.

We have lost the ability to swim like a fish; to swing on tendrils attached to the mighty trunks of the trees; to be carried from place to place by flying seeds; and we like to think of this, because it is all part of ourselves, only it was a long, long time ago. We are akin to the whole wide world, we have established ties of strong family feeling, yet at the same time we recognize our own personality in people of a totally different way of life, and even in animals, even in plants.

To-day I am resting from my illness and cannot work. Why not indulge myself a little more in this homely philosophy? It is a hard truth that although man makes the world after his own image and resemblance, the world, in spite of this, can exist without him. The artist should be aware of this better than anyone else, and it is an indispensable condition of artistic creation that he should be able to forget himself and affirm his belief in the existence of both living and dead outside himself. It seems to me that science merely makes up the losses realized by the artist's personal picture of things. Thus, if an artist, feeling his kinship with the birds, gives wings to his fantasy, we fly with him in thought; then along comes the savant with his calculations, and we fly on the wings of a machine. Art and science, taken together, are the power in us for the recovery of our lost kinship.

Towards midday and again during the evening it thundered slightly, and later came the steady, warm rain. In a single hour the ice on the lake turned from white to transparent, and took to itself, like the strip of water nearer the shore, the blue of the sky, so that we saw the lake again as one wide expanse.

After the storm the mist rose along the path through the woods, and every ten paces a pair of hazel-hens flew across the

clearing. The black grouse were calling with all their strength; the whole forest hissed and bubbled with life.

In the darkness, looking from the edge of the town, three groups of lights could be seen: above were the blue-grey stars, along the horizon the larger yellow lights of the town, and down below on the lake the enormous red torches of the fishermen. When some of these lights came nearer the shore you could see the smoke as well, and the fishermen with their harpoons, recalling the figures with the dragons on the Olvia and Pantikape vases.[1]

But I have forgotten the most important thing of all; after a long search we found the tree which creaked; it was a silver birch which in the slightest breeze would rub against an aspen; where the two branches had been rubbing together the birch had now softened the bruise with an outpouring of sap; that was why the trees had stopped their surge and creaking.

[1] The Pantikape vase is a famous black-glazed perfume jar with figures in relief and painted, of fourth-century Greek workmanship, found in 1837 at Pantikape, the ancient capital of the Greek colony in the Cimmerian Bosphorus, now Kerch. The vase is now in the Hermitage, Leningrad. The Olvia vase came from a similar site in the Taman peninsula.

THE SPRING OF GREEN GROWING THINGS

THE COMING OF THE FINCHES

BETWEEN the arrival of the finches and the first time we hear the cuckoo, our spring unfolds itself in all its beauty, as varied and delicate as the interlacing branches of the leafless birch. During this time the snows melt away; the streams swell into torrents; the earth is covered with green growing things and the first and sweetest flowers; the buds of the poplar burst open and the tiny green leaves are smeared with an aromatic balsam; and then comes the cuckoo. Only then, after all this loveliness, do people say: 'Spring has begun. How beautiful it is!'

But to the sportsman the coming of the cuckoo means the end of spring. How can it be spring when all the birds are sitting on their nests, and embarking on what is for them the busiest time of the whole year?

With the arrival of the cuckoo the woods are full of strangers, knowing nothing of all that nature has gone through to achieve all this luxury. The casual shot of some leisured idler makes you lose the thread of your thoughts, and you make off as fast as you can to avoid hearing another. Sometimes you may be walking early one morning through the dew-drenched grass and see, by their tracks, that someone has been that way before you. Immediately you turn and walk in another direction, changing all your plans for the day simply because you have seen another's tracks in the grass. Or you come to a secluded spot and sit down on a stump and rest for a while, thinking: 'After all, the forest is big enough; there must be miles of it where no one has ever trodden, and on this very stump, perhaps, no one has ever sat before. . . .' But your eyes stray around and light on a broken egg-shell, below the stump.

I have often heard it said that mushrooms, when human eyes look at them, will cease to grow; but I have often proved it is not true. I have also been told that birds will leave a nest humans have touched; but I have proved that birds are naïve and confiding in this respect. But once a child looked at me with the eyes

of a lost soul; it seemed as if sin itself was watching me, and that such a look would stop the mushrooms from growing and make the birds desert their nest.

Perhaps that is why I am never at my ease in the forest when the cuckoo comes and the woods are full of strangers, knowing nothing of all that nature has endured to achieve this luxury. I like the woods best after the arrival of the finches, when the snow is still unspoilt, and when, as you walk along the ridges, you seem to be waiting for something. It is not often really good weather; something or other is always not quite right—a hard frost, or drizzling rain, or the wind, as in autumn, whistling through the leafless branches. But at last an evening comes when the early sallows unfold themselves; you catch the scent of the green grass; and the primroses appear. Then you look back and remember how many twilit evenings you have waited for this, how much has to be endured before such an evening comes with all its loveliness. Then it almost seems as if you and the sun and the wind and the clouds had worked together to bring it all about, and you seem to hear their answer to your question:

'No, you have not waited in vain!'

THE TORRENT

WATCHING the mass migration of the finches, I remembered the Popov spinney, a ridge of higher ground surrounded by shallow pools and creeks, and walked over to see whether the birds were resting there. I was not mistaken, the bushes were crowded with them, and the sky full of little birds, as if they had been spread with a trowel. I put up a flock of wood-pigeons in the spinney; one of them had already been mauled by a hawk. A brown owl flew by, and soon afterwards a crow emerged from nowhere and began to overtake it. Two pairs of storks met and flew on together, and after them a large flock appeared, flying in their usual triangular formation. Now and then I noticed a bird of a species quite unknown to me, but when I looked at it through the binoculars I realized that it was only a crow or a jackdaw carrying material for the nest. One bird baffled me for a long time, it was so white and of such an

enormous size. Luckily this fabulous creature came nearer, and at length I realized that it was a jackdaw with a whole newspaper in its beak. Unsighted by its burden, it flew quite close to me; when I shouted it dropped the newspaper on a hump not far away. It fell with the front page uppermost, and through the glasses I could read the title: *Poverty*.

Soon after sunrise a heavy cloud passed over and there was a sharp shower, but very soon the sun got to work and the pools began to fill up. The lower ground was still covered with snowdrifts, while the road, washed out in places, was indicated by a layer of ice about four feet thick. An old man from Dyatkov—I recognized him easily through the binoculars, that same old man whose sons had all been killed in the war and who was now living with all their wives in an old hut—came along with a load of hay, which he would no doubt sell in the town for the highest price obtainable. I wished him well, but watched with some anxiety his approach to the break in the road. To all appearance it was much safer on the road itself, high up above the fields, while on the level, on this side at any rate, it appeared to be deep mud and a proper torrent of water. But for some reason or other the old man chose to go right through the water. He got stuck once or twice, of course, but soon pulled himself clear and drove away. Just after him a young fellow came along, also with a load of hay, and after some hesitation took his cart along the other side, where all the water was coming from. But as soon as he reached the break in the road the horse sank down till only its head could be seen above the snowdrift, while the driver was up to his waist in water and cursing volubly. A group of pedestrians soon collected and all of them, including the women, helped to pull the cart out of the drift. It looked as if they were using the shaft as a sort of lever, the women bearing down at one end while the men pushed at the other; gradually the cart was pulled back on the road. The young fellow harnessed up again and took the road back, and somebody shouted in farewell: 'Thank your lucky stars! This time last year a man was drowned here!'

Returning at midday, I saw some blackcock flying over the Brusnik ravine. I started to call them, they answered and came back hurrying towards me through the Popov spinney like a flock of hens. The brown owl had settled in the pine tree, and the wood-pigeons were feeding in a large party. Then I noticed that

same young man who had been nearly drowned that morning coming along the road again with his load of hay. I guessed that after making up his mind first thing in the morning to sell some of his hay and have a drink or two in the town, he could not stomach his defeat and was coming again to try his luck; or perhaps somebody had told him the old man had managed to get by safely, because he knew the best way was not along the top of the road, but down below. This time, without any hesitation, the young fellow drove along where the old man had gone before him, went through the water without a check and continued on his way.

The torrent ran noisily into the lake, pouring through each gap in the snowdrifts. A fish-hawk flew by, chased by some crows. Then the song thrushes appeared, and quite on its own, a marvellous blackbird, very well built and with a golden bill.

In the depths of the ravine the torrent roared, while I sat on the bank whistling an accompaniment to the song of the finches, with a solitary grouse gabbling to himself under the slender birches. Never before had I seen so many small birds; the spinney was swarming with them; suddenly they would all fly up in a cloud, like mosquitoes, then they would run in the meadow, then fly up into the trees again, all singing; and this song, with the swell of the torrent, the gabbling of the grouse, the cooing of the wood-pigeons, the cries and throbbing of the storks, brought to the surface the most deep-lying and long-neglected emotions.

I made my way down to the stream, found the plank across, and cut a long pole with my axe to support myself as I went over. On the other side I laid my pole in a conspicuous place, hoping that it might be of use to anyone else who wanted to cross the torrent.

Now I needed my keenest senses in the woods, for I had to judge where the woodcock were nesting. There were several shacks or cabins thereabouts, and one I found seemed prettier than the others, but as there was still time, I was looking for the best. At length one in particular caught my fancy. On the right, across the swampy fields, stood a ribbon of birches by the stream, and behind them stood the dark pines. To the left the drier ground rose to a small ridge covered with shrubs and undergrowth. By the shack on this narrow strip between dry land and bog I could wait for the woodcock.

The shack itself was surrounded by juniper trees, and between them rose a tall pine, and right on the very summit sat a song thrush, whistling from time to time on his flute, as if he were leading the song of the forest to the approaching sunset.

I was not sure the sunset would be worth waiting for, so there and then under the bushes I prepared to wait for the dawn. Before it became too dark to see I found an old but well-remembered path to the shack where at one time they used to brew corn liquor. For some time I worked hard making a bed of pine needles and lighting a camp fire. I slept lightly, so that I could hear my own snoring, and wake up when I had to attend to the fire.

I awoke when the early morning frost had turned to dew and the drops hung glistening in the sunshine. The birds were singing all round me in praise of the sunshine and the earth already green with the first grasses; a song that is only heard in our woods for a few days during the migration. I listened for a long while, and now and then I could look at the birds through my marvellous prismatic binoculars, so clear that I could distinguish each separate feather. My glasses, throwing the reflection from prism to prism, from lens to lens, created form out of chaos, by itself an outstanding feat of artistry, to which I also added a little of my own.

Later I walked up to the spinney, and as I was watching the road through the fields down to the stream with the glasses, I saw a girl approach the spot where I had left my pine pole the night before. Her orange skirt was fastened up over her shoulders, in her hand she carried a pair of brightly polished shoes, which she would put on only when she arrived at the church, and an umbrella, used very rarely in company or on the hottest summer day.

I was glad my pole would help her over to the other side of the torrent, but was very annoyed to see her hide it in the bushes and cover it with leaves.

However, somebody else must have been watching her from the other bank, for as soon as she was out of sight the pole was pulled out from its hiding-place and carried some distance away, and again concealed in the bushes. It was clear the girl would soon be coming back, so I sat on the stump of a tree and waited for my pole to be returned to this side of the stream.

Swarms of finches were flying from the spinney across the marsh, chasing one another in their courting flight, settling again in small groups on the green earth, and then returning to the woods to continue their singing.

Now the girl in the orange skirt is coming back; she reaches the stream, looks for the pole, is unable to find it, and wanders round and round searching for it. . . .

I take the glasses down. I can see with the naked eye how a satyr emerges from the bushes, finds the pole at once and helps the girl over to the other side.

THE THEME

In the Fisherman's Village, where everything was so poor and shabby, I noticed how the gulls perched on the mooring-posts, quite undisturbed, while the children were playing all round them. Knowing my own, better-educated children, and how hard it had been to teach them to be kind to animals, I thought to myself: 'How many generations of fishermen must have come and gone, handing on from one to another the commandment to preserve these beautiful, but probably quite useless birds, so that now these half-wild boys never think of throwing stones at them; and that the emotions some of us get from Raphael's Madonna these poor folks manage to find in their gulls; that is probably why we get on so well together and understand one another.'

Petya and Lyova arrived to-day and immediately set upon the gulls and frightened them. Disturbed by the children's unexpected attack, they all rose in a body from their resting-places, scattering till the sky was full of them, then one by one they settled on the grass till the fields were white as though snow had fallen. We were told that the gulls were protected by the local people, shooting them was entirely forbidden, and for years they had been known to the common folk as 'the soarers'.

Robinson paid us another visit and was at once attracted to Lyova, congratulating him on his choice of occupation after leaving the secondary school—he was entering a co-operative—adding that this was the road to power and mastery. Lyova

replied with some heat that if in fact this was so, then power and mastery were even more necessary now, and that it was far better for us to be masters, than gentry like him, and that he needn't think he was a member of the Young Communist League either, he was strictly non-party.

'I'm not one of the gentry either,' replied Robinson. 'I'm just an ordinary miller, but I still believe in personal freedom and don't wish to bow down to any man.'

'Exactly. You only think of the personal side of it, you have no conception of the new idea of your duty to the community; when you work for the community you would simply have to do as you are told. Look at my father, for instance, he's getting on a bit now, but he can see this—but you can't see it, just because you are one of the middle classes, but he has risen from the common people.'

'Now then, Lyova,' I said, and began to laugh, 'how did you come to remember that, when I had almost forgotten it myself?'

Robinson said:

'Lyova, the others have been getting at me quite enough for being one of the gentry, are you going to start as well?'

'Are you really a believer?' asked Lyova.

'I am.'

'What sort of a person do you imagine God to be?'

'All-powerful, proud, and selfish.'

'The ideal of the middle classes. Do you go to church?'

'No, I don't have anything to do with parsons.'

'Now that's more like it!'

The children soon got on well together; Mikhail Ivanovitch's two, Sonya and Syeva, just finishing the junior school; Serge Sergeyitch's Galya, and three of his sons, students, had also come along. My boys were dressed as if for a party; Lyova even had an English overcoat, so he was immediately nicknamed Curzon. Even Petya, always a trifle down-at-heel, was wearing some new clothes. Being a holiday, they all addressed one another in the familiar manner with 'thee' and 'thou', and danced in the courtyard of the museum.

Then suddenly, without any warning, like a fall of snow, there appeared three delegates from the Sokolniki biological station of young naturalists: one in an Austrian soldier's overcoat, the second in an English one, and the third in a Russian overcoat,

and when they took them off, they looked even worse; one poor fellow's trousers were a long way from reaching his boots. They all carried either a kitbag or a haversack, and a gun in their belts. They looked at our well-dressed young people as if they were beings from another world; introduced themselves, and made themselves scarce. Even Lyova, the most advanced thinker among our boys, seemed to feel the influence of the holiday, and when he brought the young men to me at Botik, felt it necessary to explain:

'Here are some bandit chaps come to see you from Sokolniki.'

We made ourselves known to one another. The boys had heard of me, of course, and treated me with considerable respect. I was warmed by their sympathy, and I immediately trotted out my hobby-horse. I told them about my plans to build up an observation post there for preserving wild life, and about my own aim of bringing science and literature closer together.

'The majority of animals and plants,' I continued, 'are very closely connected with the life of man, but up to now science had occupied itself very little with these relations. Probably literature would be some assistance here. Take, for example, the gulls and the fishes, and observe how the life of these poor folk here linked up with the loveliest of birds. . . .'

The eldest among the naturalists remarked 'That's a theme!' and made a note in his pocket-book.

Two others, *sotto voce*:

'We'll discuss this to-day after the meeting.'

'Do you always discuss things?'

'Yes,' replied the eldest. 'We discuss everything, and then act collectively, and so we don't waste any time.'

'Then you didn't come to see me just to have a chat?'

'We came over to assess your available man-power.'

'And what conclusions have you come to, if I may ask?'

'We find you could be very useful to us from the point of view of education and political agitation; you speak well and write beautifully; as a naturalist you are probably rather on the superficial side, but as an observer you could hardly be equalled. It would be very nice if you could turn yourself to ringing birds; as a sportsman you must have a lot of birds passing through your hands.'

I shook hands with them, and smiled, to close the bargain, and

they began to talk about themselves more freely. The eldest was twenty years of age; he had finished his secondary-school course and was working as a laboratory assistant and physics teacher; he was a tall young fellow with pleasant features, a born leader and committee chairman. The second was younger, quieter, and more introspective, a fine worker; the born secretary. The third, a strong-looking fellow with a sailor's tattoo marks on his wrists, had a strange history: he was a former 'bisprizornie',[1] he had seen poverty and sunk right down to the depths. But chance had brought him to this biological station, where he saw other 'bisprizornie' working with microscopes. Just as in earlier times such a boy would suddenly turn to religion and enter a monastery, so he was converted to science, started work there, and had already finished his training. His face had rather an Eastern cast about it, but his name was Palkin.

'You can see our point all right,' they said, 'but it's different with these Young Communist Leaguers.'

'But aren't you Komsomol members yourselves?'

'Yes, and members of the Party as well, but naturalists before everything, and so we understand the significance of life in the community.'

Suddenly they all looked at the clock; they had to hurry to their Komsomol meeting, where they would outline their new approach to the solution of political problems via the study of biology.

By way of farewell I asked:

'What do you think? Could we start a biological station here with your help?'

The chairman replied:

'We'll check your working forces and then we'll tell you more exactly.'

[1] 'Bisprizornie': homeless and orphan children, very common after the 1914–18 War and the October Revolution.

THE GIRL IN THE BIRCHES

The birches had just begun to deck themselves out in their fresh green, and this seemed to give the forest a deeper and more virgin appearance. The train no longer seemed a monster here—on the contrary, I was very happy, sitting by the window and admiring the continuous and endless vista of the gleaming birches. By the next window stood a girl; young, but not particularly good-looking; her forehead was perhaps a trifle high, and in a rather unexpected, scholarly manner it curved back to the temples almost in a right angle; it was this, no doubt, that made me think at first that she worked in a chemist's shop. From time to time she would turn her head back and look round the car, like a bird: was there a hawk or something following her? Then she would turn swiftly to the window again.

I wanted to see what it was she was looking for, there in the green mass of the birch trees. I got up quietly and looked out of the window. She was watching the green mass of the gleaming young birches and smiling to herself, whispering something softly, and with a light flush on her cheeks.

THE FLOWERING OF THE LUNGWORT

The poplar and aspen were in bloom, as well as lungwort, wolf's bast,[1] and all the other early flowers. My close study and passionate interest in the changes of nature had enabled me to know beforehand much that went on in the world of flowers, animals, and birds; on occasion I could even foretell the weather with a certain amount of confidence; but in early spring there are so many changes in the course of only one single day that even the fishermen make mistakes sometimes.

This morning the east was clear at dawn, but the rest of the sky was covered with a thin grey cloud, and the cloud seemed to

[1] 'Vol'che liko'—wolf's bast, is described in one of Prishvin's other stories as a small, violet-coloured flower with very tough stems, from which, the country people say, the wolves weave themselves baskets.

be holding some kind of conference with the sun. At the same time the fishermen were also holding a conference about their first trip on the lake. Ivan Ivannitch, the churchwarden's father, the oldest and most experienced of them all, was the first to appear on the lakeside, but nowadays he took no part in the fishing. He only acted as a kind of barometer for the others. By the time they had all gathered together Ivan Ivannitch had already made up his mind that later in the day the wind would rise and drive the ice together again, so they had better not put out to-day.

The other fishermen considered this advice.

I tried to get out of them what they were actually thinking, but whatever it was it seemed more like feelings than thoughts; these fishermen had to be studied as carefully as Nature herself. All I could make out was that the ice-roach would soon be on the move, and then the mud-pike, but after that, opinion seemed to vary about the order of the different kinds of fish. Summing up the contradictions, the old man finally remarked:

'There are all sorts of *beasties* in the lake.'

Against all expectation the sun came out triumphantly, and the fishermen, ignoring the old man's advice, set out between the ice-packs and the shore to Uryev, where the river Veksa issues from the lake.

At seven in the morning the sun was already hidden behind the clouds, and a very light, barely perceptible breeze began to blow from the north.

At midday a fresh breeze rose, and the glass began to fall.

Towards evening it developed into a blizzard, with heavy snow, turning our green lawn white again. The ice came towards us and piled up on the shore, and it all happened just as the old man had foretold: the fishermen were trapped by the pack ice near Uryev.

This was the first evening they had not taken the lanterns out for the pike-fishing; the whole lakeside was silent in the grip of the ice; the lights could be seen only in the north, where the water was free.

Studying the dead and featureless mass of ice, this far-from-tranquil corpse of winter, Dumnov the pike-fisher remarked:

'The bad son-in-law has come to pay his wife's mother a visit.'

A MAY FROST

EVERYTHING promised a night of sharp frost. At one o'clock I went out into the oak coppice by moonlight, where there were always many small birds and early flowers. For this reason I had called that spot the 'land of small birds and spring flowers'.

Soon the first light began to appear in the west, and the light passed over to the east, as if the dawn, unseen below the line of the horizon, were drawing the sunset over to itself. I walked rapidly, and soon warmed up, so that I hardly noticed how sharply the frost was catching the grass and the early flowers. When the hour before dawn arrived, and the cold was more intense than ever, I picked one of the violets and tried to warm it in my palm, but the tiny flower was brittle and broke in pieces in my hand.

THE WHITE-HEADED THRUSH

The director of the museum didn't appear to be very pleased with the young naturalists. He pointed to their badly written signatures in the visitors' book, and said to me:

'I don't think much of biologists who can't read or write. They must be good teachers!'

From one point of view he probably wasn't far wrong, but I had my own ideas on the matter; I was never a very good writer at school either.

I used to spend hours at mathematics when I was a boy, and it is a branch of science which always seemed quite beyond me. Yet twenty years later, when I had to help my own boy with his lessons, I read straight through the algebra book in three days.

Nowadays all this is well understood. The method by which I completely failed to learn algebra is known as 'ready-made knowledge method', while the method I used later, when I really wanted to learn it from internal compulsion, is called the 'research method'. The difference between the two lies in this: in the first method the compulsion comes from outside, while in the research method I supplied the incentive myself. The teacher's problem is simply that of arousing this self-activity in each pupil.

This is how I see the matter now, yet on the walls of such a progressive institution as the Sokolnikov biological station this research method is displayed in the form of graphs of such complexity, with so many arrows, brackets, and connecting lines, that they are often as hard to decipher as any problem in spherical trigonometry. I am certain that if this experimental method were used in the same way in the provinces, this dead body would be just as dead as the corpse of ready-made knowledge.

'I agree that it is very bad, my dear Mikhail Ivannitch,' I replied, 'but it's not just the fact that the lads cannot read or write.'

'But they are supposed to be coming here to teach us!'

'Why take it so seriously? All they want to do is to check our available resources.'

That evening the chairman came to me with a number of test-tubes full of different insects, and a sample of the water from the Gremyachaya spring. When I asked him what he wanted the water for he said they wanted to analyse it. Then I told him they already had a detailed analysis in the museum, so he promptly poured it away. This unnecessary work had to be done because according to the research method all previous knowledge gained from books must be ignored; in the books it is all there cut and dried, while the proper way is to find it all out for yourself. At school, however, the teacher very carefully arranges the work so that the pupil seems to be tackling the subject himself, in actual fact he is only acting under the teacher's orders. In real life it is often necessary to prove to your own personal satisfaction something that has already been done by others; in other words America has to be discovered over and over again.

As we came out of the house we realized that in spite of the wintry landscape some of the evening birds were beginning to sing now and again.

The young chairman asked:

'Listen, what bird is that singing?'

'A thrush.'

'But what sort of a thrush?'

'I don't know. What do you think?'

'I can't say; in our school we have a rule that if you know don't tell anybody. Shoot it, and find out for yourself.'

'My dear fellow,' I replied, 'please make an exception for my sake. I don't like shooting a bird for mere curiosity, especially when it sings like that. I appreciate bird-song first of all as a song, and only later as a subject for scientific investigation. Tell me, as one friend to another.'

He thought for a while and then replied:

'It's a Siberian thrush.'

No; I couldn't see anything wrong with these lads; at their age I had been a good deal worse, and I had been brought up by parents and relations, and when I felt ill, they had given me a soothing powder, but these 'bisprizornie' were children of the streets, and at some time or other they had probably been cocaine-addicts. Palkin had almost certainly been one.

THE BAD SON-IN-LAW

After a warm night the sun rose in great strength and in complete silence. As before, the lake was separated into two distinct parts; to the north the open water, but near us the green, evil-looking ice with its white crevasses.

Soon after dawn a light breeze from the south began to blow and gradually grew stronger, and at midday a cry was heard:

'He's gone! He's gone! He's gone away!'

'Who's gone away?' I shouted through the window.

'The bad son-in-law,' replied Ivan Akimitch.

We realized that the ice had melted away from the shore of the lake up to the Gremyachaya hills.

By this time the 'bad son-in-law' was far away. The fishing boats which had been held in the ice near Uryev for two days were free, and the whole fleet was joyfully returning home, while near us the open blue water flashed in the sun. The fishermen came to the shore with their spears, thousands of gulls came down out of the blue, and all together in one huge mass they formed a white island on the blue water not far from the

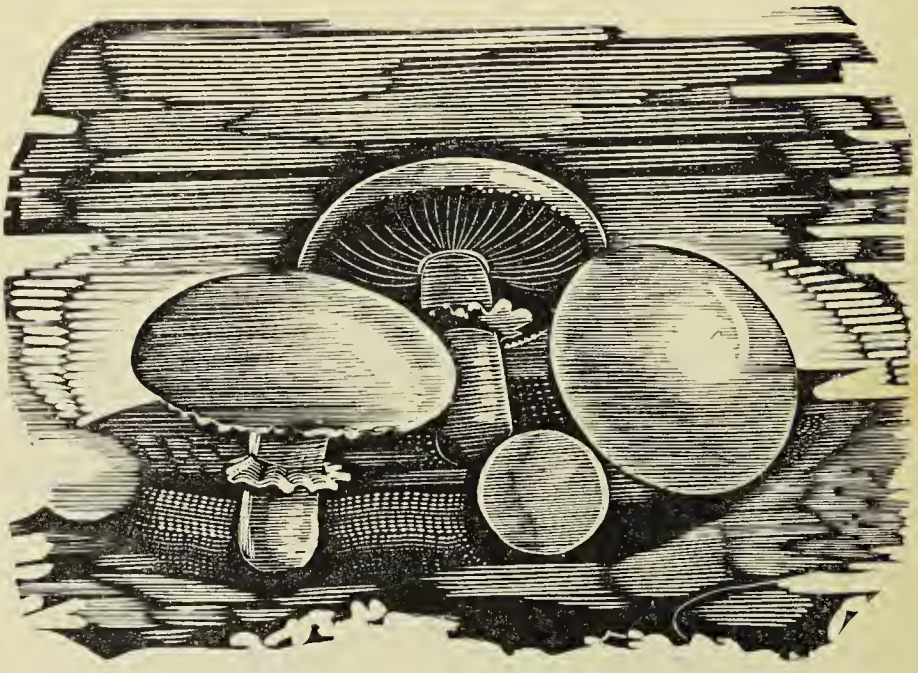
shore; and as sometimes happens, the blue water seemed higher than the level of the town, yet without overflowing it. Suddenly the white island of gulls scattered, and the poor Russian town appeared like a fairy tale between the white wings and the blue water.

As I watched the gleaming Kityejh river, winnowed by the gulls' wings, I remembered that the young naturalists were holding their meeting about the gulls to-day, and the children told me they were very concerned about how much it would cost for powder and shot, and whether after all it would be a business proposition to shoot them all, and thus destroy these harmful birds.

All our young people and the local sportsmen were meeting in the museum—what if they did take it into their heads to destroy all this loveliness? I went down to the lake itself and asked one of the old fishermen whether it was true that the gull was a nuisance.

The fisherman replied:

'Nuisance? Who told you that? Just watch them, and notice how often they swoop down to the water and come away empty, they don't seem to do very well out of it. But when you go up into the fields you see all the gulls up there following the plough. One day we were out shooting: we had some visitors down from Moscow, and they started an argument about which birds were useful and which harmful. We heard a woodpecker drumming near by, and they said: "Look what a nuisance the woodpecker is to the trees!" But we had our own clever man there, a doctor, a fine chap. He took them over to the tree and asked: "Why does this tree wither away?" They answered: "Because the worms bore holes in it." "There you are," said our doctor, "the woodpecker is after the grubs; he's not the tree's enemy, but its doctor." So you go and see for yourself how the gulls follow the ploughman.'



THE APPEARANCE OF THE MUSHROOMS

It was very warm this morning, with a heavy dew. After dinner there was a shower 'out of the clouds', but later on it rained quite hard, contrary to the accepted saying that after a heavy dew the day will always turn out fine and warm.

Even now the lake had not quite reached its shore. In the chocolate-coloured woods it looked as if some of the tree-tops were turning green, but this was not the young growth of the trees themselves, but the green meadows showing through the leafless branches. Along the edge of the lake the white-cheeked wagtail, with his black necktie and black apron, was running about and getting his feet wet; the grey plover swayed above the water. The crest of the lapwing poked out above the yellow last-year's grass. The drake swam out quacking with the ducks behind him.

The track running through the wood had disappeared; in early spring nobody ever travelled that way. If it stayed like this much longer, the forest would soon swallow up the entire road, telegraph poles and all. One of the ruts was so deep that on a wet day it became the channel of a stream, and this, of course, made it deeper still. In the other wheel-track the tall trees had

scattered their seed down from above, and where there had once been the track of a cart, this had now been transformed into an alley of the most varied young trees. Between the saplings there were grasses and flowers—nowhere else have I seen so many anemones and violets. Most remarkable of all was the white path beaten flat by the foot of man; now it was hidden by innumerable growing sprigs of bird-cherry, hazel, and birch. A brimstone butterfly hovered past. What a pleasure it was to walk along that path! I began to wonder why perfectly healthy folk of my acquaintance went to the Crimea.

The ground was steaming in the hot sun. They had begun the ploughing for the spring corn. This was the time for the appearance of the oatmeal-mushroom. It was so soft in the woods that as you walked along your feet sank in the mud: an endless succession of kisses. You come out into a clearing and the kissing stops. Over there stands an old birch stump, and a vigorous young fir is growing out of the top. Behind the stump there are the sought-for mushrooms; as you pick them the finches scatter. I was happy because I had seen my wish come true. I had not gone to the Crimea; I had borne without complaining the bitter times, and now my reward had come. The Crimea had come to me.

GREEN FIR TREES!

In the museum the naturalists explained from the outset that we could hardly expect *fully qualified and officially accredited* fellow-workers from Moscow to direct our work; we already had sufficient man-power available to make some sort of a beginning.

Palkin spoke first on the need of confining our studies to what would be actually useful. The country was still very poor, and we could not afford the luxury of measuring, for example, the size of a toad's eyelids—not yet, at any rate. We should have to give first place to work to do with the national economy; second, to hygiene; and third and last, to materialism.

One of the best of our young students of wild life could not contain himself at the word 'materialism'. He blurted:

'But aren't we supposed to carry on our studies without thinking what we get out of it?'

'Green fir-trees!' cried Palkin. 'Materialism doesn't mean what you get out of things; materialism is how things are produced and where they come from, and all that. See?'

'Yes, I can see that. But how can we study things without instructors?'

'What have you got up there, brains or a pound of raisins? Use your brains according to our research methods; you'll find twenty young beginners can do the work of any professor.'

This was a somewhat risky treatment of the theory of quantity being transformed into quality, and it did arouse some unintelligible comment from several youngsters, and one grumbling voice was heard:

'That depends on the professor.'

Palkin agreed, but it was a minor point, he said; the really important thing was not to slack, and to remember how much the value of the work depended on collaborating with government projects. The first priority had to be given to official contacts.

We had a general debate on this, and then the chairman gave us an example of how to use this research method:

'Take as a theme,' he said, 'the life of the gull. Study the gull without looking at a single book on the subject; use the books afterwards merely as a check on your findings. First count all the gulls: here you have one advantage of the collective method. A count like this would be next to impossible single-handed, but if you got the whole school together, and on a given day at a given time spread yourselves out over the fields and along the shores of the lake, it would be easy.

'Next you have to find out how many fish the gulls take from the lake, and how much they provide in the way of feathers. The credit side is the feathers from the birds; the harm they do is in gobbling up the fish; you have to find out which is the greater. And if it appears that the birds are a pest, then you must override local prejudices and destroy the lot. Even then you have to bear in mind the principles of political economy, and estimate whether the cost of shooting them is more than the value of the feathers they give. . . .'

At this critical point I made a friendly suggestion to the chair-

man: unfortunately, I said, the sporting temperament of our youngsters would make this research into the value of the gull rather uncongenial. But it would not prevent them from an investigation like that into the fox, for example. . . .

The chairman agreed. He was quite eager: the fox *was* a pest; they destroyed fowls, but at the same time they did much good in keeping down the field-mice, and the value of this was very much greater than the harm of taking a hen or so from time to time; even if the fox were a pest, it did some good. Gulls also eat insects, and that might be considered a point in their favour.

Serge Sergeyitch then told us how he had often saved toads from the destructive hands of the village children; the toad was such a useful creature that in Paris and London they were even sold in the shops and many gardeners paid good money for them.

After this preparation our sympathy for the gulls was strongly aroused, and the feeling was general that it would perhaps be better after all, before undertaking such a complicated piece of research into the value or otherwise of the gulls, to consult the literature of the subject. Possibly the question had been settled long ago. But the most important thing came at the very end of the meeting. It appeared that these young naturalists were very good at dissection: this was something we could learn; besides, they had brought some aluminium rings with them. These were slipped on the legs of the migrating birds, which were then released; then, somewhere in New Guinea, perhaps, they would be caught, while we caught the birds they had ringed out there. So people of all countries would be brought together by this scientific work, and we would learn all about the air-routes of the migrating birds, and this would tell us much about the early life of our planet.

THE SPRING OF THE WOODS

THE LAKE IS FREE

In the history of the earth the life of a lake is very short; at one time there had been a fine lake at Berendeyevo, whence came all the legends about the Tsar Berendei. But now the lake is dead, and has become a swamp. Lake Pleshcheyevo is still very young, and seems to be getting younger. Besides the innumerable forest streams that empty into it, it has many powerful tributaries, while along the Trubejh river and what is still left of Lake Berendeyevo many stories still go around about the Berendeans.

Our learned men have many different theories about the life of a lake; I am no specialist in the subject, and I cannot pretend to pass judgement on their speculations; all I can say is that my own life is like that of the lake; I know I shall certainly die, and the lakes, and the seas and the planet itself; they are all dying. There is nothing here to quarrel about, apparently; yet when we speak of death, why does the stupid question always arise: 'What can we do?'

It is because life is greater than science. Life is impossible with a merely despairing attitude towards death, so that people usually express their feelings on this topic in fairy-tales and jokes: 'All men are mortal; I am a man, but this doesn't mean anything; we shall all die, but I shall manage to avoid it somehow.' The simple Berendeans replace these pitiful jokes and evasions of ordinary people with their great workaday rule: 'Prepare to die, but sow your rye.'

The pressure of life is immensely stronger than mere logic, so there is nothing to be afraid of in science. I am no longer young, for ever busy keeping my pitcher full of water, and I know that as long as I can keep it full thoughts of death are empty. It will have to come some time, no doubt, but in spite of this I light my samovar every morning quite contentedly: my own samovar, which had served me so faithfully for so many years, since my first meeting with my lady Bereneyevna right up to our silver wedding.

Only on the very lightest days does the light rise earlier than I do, but even then I always get up well before the sun, at a time when even the ordinary field and forest Berendeans are still in bed. Tipping the samovar over the ash-bin, I rake out yesterday's embers, fill it up with water from the Gremyachaya spring, light the kindling, and leave it to itself, leaning the chimney against the wall of the yard near the back door. While it is boiling up I prepare two places at the table on the veranda. That done, I blow on the charcoal for the last time, make the tea, and sit down to the table, and from that moment onwards it is not I, the ordinary man of many worries, sitting at the table, but Berendea himself, admiring the wide expanse of his beautiful lake and waiting for the sunrise.

Soon the Lady Berendeyevna comes down to tea, and looking round to see that everything is in order, remarks:

'You haven't shaved again; you do look funny; put your moustache straight.'

She tidies up Berendei, addressing him always with the formal 'you', as she always does with the boys, and Berendei submits to this in great content. His neutral relations with the woman—in a word, with the wife—had been established for a long time; she had become more like a mother to him lately, and his own children like brother-sportsmen. The time would come, no doubt, when the Lady Berendeyevna would be his old granny-wife, and his grandchildren like fresh brothers to him—as a child you enter the world, and as a child you leave it again—just like the lake; some streams flow in, and others out, but as long as you keep your pitcher full life is endless. . . .

After a while other Berendeans come out of the forest: one brings a young cockerel, another an egg, another some hand-woven cloth, and others lace. The Lady Berendeyevna inspects all this with great care, and sometimes buys one or two things, while Berendea questions them all: where they live, what they do, what sort of land they have, and how much wood and water, how they spend their feast-days and holidays, and what songs they sing.

To-day one Berendean came from the Polovetski district. He told us that in the marshy forest there they had a road three versts long, log laid to log, and cordially invited us to come over and visit them and admire it. Another Berendean—a tar-boiler—

told us a long yarn about how he split the logs into tiny pieces and how he distilled the tar, boiled the pitch, and made the turpentine. The third came from Zaladyeva.

'What does that mean?' asked Berendei. 'Why do you call it Za-ladye (beyond the ship)?'

'But the river runs there, and we live on the far side of the river, and it's called "Lada" (ship).'

'River-ship, that sounds nice!' chuckled Berendei.

'Yes,' agreed the stranger contentedly. 'On the other side of the Lada we have some very nice places, all good villages, Dudenya, Peregutka, Shchegolyonovo, and Domosyetka.'

'But in our district,' said the forest-Berendean from Vedomski, 'all you can see is stumps of trees, tar, all sorts of gnats and mosquitoes, and poor villages: Chortokligino, Leshiye Roskos, Idalovi Porti, Kramolikhe, and Glumptsi.'

Rivers and streams, brooks and springs, branches and tributaries, and even places where it was merely rather damp—the whole of Zalesya (beyond the forest) was built on this capricious pattern. Berendei resolved to explore them all as soon as Lake Pleshcheyevo was free from ice.

When the colours of the early dawn began to fade, and the sun began his ordinary golden labours, the Berendeans took themselves off, and Berendei himself disappeared.

Then I draw the curtains of my room against the sun and set to work.

But somehow I cannot do anything to-day; it all seems to hang fire. My old ginger dog Yarik watches me from the corner with his handsome, intelligent eyes, knowing I shall not be sitting there long. I cannot bear this look of his and start a philosophical discussion with him on the theme of men and animals: how the animal, who knows everything, cannot talk, while man can talk, but knows very little.

'My dear Yarik,' I continued, 'a very wise man said once that with the last animal all secrets will disappear from the earth. The horse has already disappeared from the streets of Paris, and they all say how dull it is there now with only motor-cars. But look how many horses we still have in Moscow; how many birds there are in the trees on the boulevards, there is no other large town in the world with so many birds in the streets. . . . Yarik, let you and I found a Berendean biological station here at Botik,

so that for twenty-five versts around the forest, with all its birds and beasts, and all the springs of Berendei, shall be untouched. Let there be a high school on the Gremyachaya hills, but open only to very few, those whose work is particularly promising, and this will help us to prepare for the great and joyful festival of life, in which we shall all join, bringing to it some of the qualities of the world of Berendei, instead of littering it with the paper from our sandwiches.

I could have gone on talking in this strain to Yarik for some time, but the Lady Berendeyevna cried:

'Come here! Come quickly! Come and look at the lake!'

I ran out and saw something I should never see for a second time, for now the lake was giving me of its best, and in return I must give it of my best. The entire vault of heaven, with its towns and villages, its meadows and its woods, and its simple white lamb's-tails, lay there mirrored in the lake, as if it had come to pay us a visit. . . .

Then I remembered my own springtime, when she told me: 'You have taken the best from me.' I also remembered what she said in our autumn days, when the sun had set for us, and how angry I had been, and went out and bought myself the most powerful 'Lightning' electric lamp I could get, and arranged my life in my own fashion. . . .

What happened next?

We were all silent for some time, but one of our guests, unable to bear the silence, said just for the sake of saying something:

'Look! There's some ducks over there!'

The Lady Berendeyevna sighed deeply, and said:

'If I were still the girl I was, and had seen the lake like this, I would have been on my knees. . . .'

It was one of those wonderful days of spring when everything for which we had borne so many gloomy, frosty, windy days began to show itself; and all that had been necessary to create such a day as this.

THE FIRST CUCKOO-CALL

Seeing the lake free from ice the very first thought in our minds was not to lose any time, but to go along the shore and through the woods to Usolya, the village where they made the boats.

Everything happened on our journey as if the commandment of which I had spoken to Yarik had been fulfilled.

On the right, close by the lake itself, the tall pine grove rustled and murmured, and on the left lay a wild, uncharted swamp, leading to a wide expanse of marsh. On the sunny patches in the pine grove, among the cranberry bushes, we noticed a moving shadow, and looking up, I guessed that over our heads the kites were flying noiselessly from one tree-top to another.

'It has been very cold,' the woodman said to us, 'but last night it all went very suddenly.

'At dawn this morning,' I replied, 'it was plenty cold enough.'

'And early this morning how that bird began to *shout*!'

At that moment we heard a clamour; it could hardly be recognized as a cuckoo-call, it thundered and echoed so loudly across the grove. Even the finches, the smallest of birds, were not so much singing as shouting aloud. The entire grove resounded with their song, and overhead, unheard and unrecognized except for their shadows in the patches of sunshine by the cranberry bushes, the birds of prey flew from one tree-top to another.

THE FIRST GREEN MURMUR

Towards evening the sun was clear in the west, but in the east the clouds gathered and rumbled, and it was hard to say whether we would escape a thunderstorm that night. The blue lion's yawn were flowering in the fallow land, and in the woods hare lettuce and wild sweet peas. The birch leaves, fed by the aromatic balsam, gleamed in the evening light. The scent of the bird-cherry was everywhere. The shep-

herds blew their horns and the herons throbbed. The bream and carp came close to the shore.

Noticing over on our side of the lake a huge glare, we wondered: 'Isn't that our house on fire?' But it wasn't a fire, and we asked ourselves, as you always do when you see this and fail to recognize it again: 'Well, if it isn't a fire, then whatever can it be?' When at length the outer edge of the great disc reveals itself we see at last that it is the moon, and what a moon! Behind the lake the sunset lingered a long time. In the leafy woods the light wind allowed us to hear for the first time that year the green murmur of the trees.

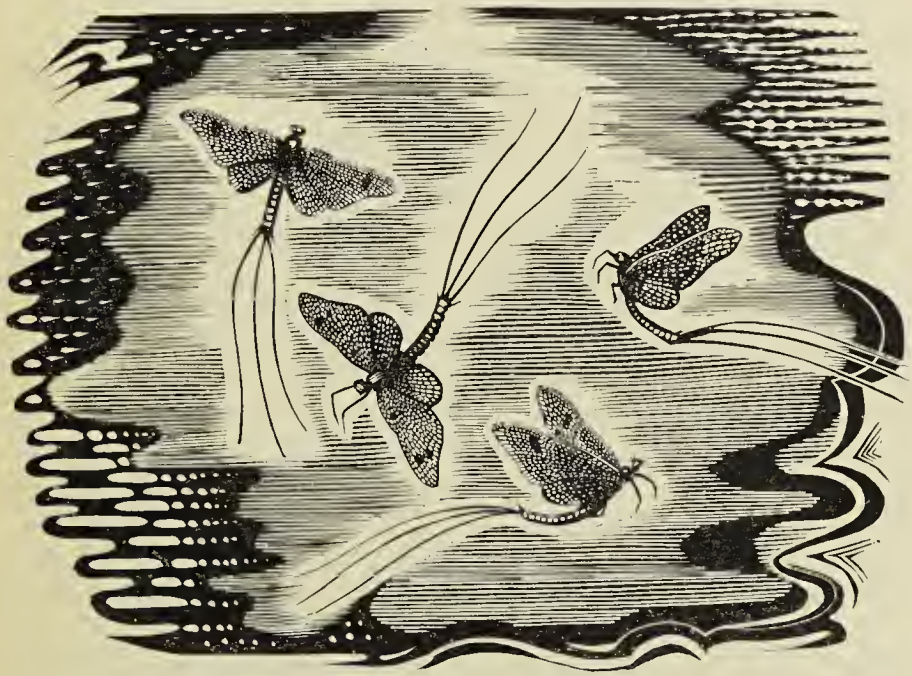
THE FIRST NIGHTINGALE

When we came out of the river into the lake the water-bull bellowed from the strip of willows—that great grey bird, the bittern—bellowing like an animal with a body at least the size of a hippopotamus. The lake was once again quiet and the water clear—all day the slight wind had been washing the surface. The tiniest sound could be heard far across the water.

We heard the water-bull distinctly sucking up the water; and then—'ukh!'—a bellow across the silence, once, twice, three times; then silence for about ten minutes, then again; 'ukh!' three or four times—we never heard more than six.

Scared by the tale told in Usolya about a fisherman who went to the bottom when his dug-out was overturned by the waves, I kept to the shadow of the lakeside; I had an idea I might hear the nightingales. Somewhere in the distance the herons kept up their throbbing as a sort of background, but even then we could hear the slightest sound in our boat: the thrushes whistled; there was a quarrel over there among the pochards, and this set up a general calling from all the different kinds of duck, and quite close at hand the wild drake was calling to his mate. Here and there, like false beacons, one could see the necks of the grebes and mergansers leaping out of the water. On the rose-coloured waves appeared the white belly of a young pike, and the black head of the larger one which had caught it.

Then the entire heavens were covered with cloud; I was unable to pick out any landmarks to steer by confidently, so I kept always to the left, hardly seeing the darkening shore. Every time the water-bull bellowed we marvelled at the sound, and tried to guess how often he would boom. It was very remarkable to hear that sound at a distance of two, and later three versts; it was still just audible seven versts away; but now we could hear distinctly the singing of the innumerable nightingales on the Gremyachaya hills.



THE MAYFLIES

The bird-cherry had not yet shed its blossom, nor the early sallows scattered their pollen, but the rowan was in flower already, and the apple, and the yellow acacias; all the flowering trees blossomed together this spring.

Then the massed flight of the mayflies began.

Early in the morning the calm waters of the lake were spread with the pollen of all the flowering trees and plants, and as I

rowed, you could see the track of the boat like a path across the lake. There was a circle where a duck had rested, and a small dimple where a fish had appeared above the surface.

Forest and lake embraced one another.

I came close to the shore to savour the smell of the balsam poplar. A large fir lay there, shorn of its branches to the very summit, with the branches lying by its side, and many other cuttings of aspen and alder, with their leaves all faded. These damaged trunks, with their amputated members, lying there and rotting away, gave off the most pleasant smell, to the great surprise of animals like ourselves, who cannot understand how it is possible to live and even die fragrantly.

THE ORIOLES

The candles on the fir trees were visible from a long way off. The rye came up to one's knees. Every tree, all the tall grasses, and all the flowers were dressed up in their best clothes. The birds of early spring were silent now; the cocks, moulting, had hidden themselves away, and the hens were devoted to their nests. All the animals were busy seeking food for their young. The peasant was short-handed for everything: what with the spring sowing and the ploughing and the rush of all his other jobs.

The orioles, quails, martins, and shore-swallows had arrived. After a night's rain the morning began with a thick mist, which cleared to a rather fresh but sunny day. Just before sunset the wind blew in the opposite direction, from our hills across to the lake, but the ripples still ran this way for a time. The large, pale, and ragged sphere of the sun sank behind a dark cloud over the woods.

The orioles are very fond of changeable, unsettled weather; they seem to like the sun to be constantly going in and coming out again; they seem to like the wind to be playing with the leaves as it plays with the waves. Orioles, swallows, gulls, and martins—they seem to have been born for the wind.

It had been dark since early morning. Then it became close, and a large cloud reared up. The wind rose, and to the fluting of the orioles and the shriek of the martins the clouds gathered near

Zazarye, in the forest; then they came towards us against our own wind, black, with an enormous white cap. The lake was disturbed and uneasy: wind against wind, and wave against wave; and black patches, like the shadows of wings, hurried across from one side to the other. Then the lightning lit up the distant shore, and the thunder pealed. The orioles were silent, the martins were subdued. But the nightingale sang to the very end, until, most likely, a large warm drop of thunder rain fell on the back of his neck. Then it began to pour as if it came out of a bucket.

THE MARTINS

After the thunderstorm it suddenly became very cold, and a strong wind blew from the north. The martins and shore-swallows were not so much flying as spilling themselves about in the sky.

The wind blew unceasingly, day and night, and this morning, in the full radiance of the sun, and across the ever-running waves with their white caps, and the tireless, spinning clouds of martins and all kinds of swallows—all the gulls flew out from Gremyachaya together, like the birds in the fairy-tale, only instead of blue birds, it was white on blue. . . . The white birds, the blue sky, the white caps on the waves, the black swallows—and all intent on one thing, eating or being eaten. The midges swarm and fall into the water, the fish rise after the midges, the gulls after the fishes, the minnow after the worm, the perch after the minnow, the pike after the perch, and from above the fish-hawks after the pike.

In the cold dawn, when the wind died down a little, we raised a sail and went through the fire-moulded water in the teeth of the breeze. Not far away a fish-hawk swooped down on a pike, but soon realized he had made a mistake; the pike was bigger and stronger than he was; after a short struggle the pike rose out of the water, the fish-hawk flapped his enormous wings, but he could not free his claws from the pike's mouth and the aquatic beast of prey pulled the marauder from the air down under the water. The indifferent waves carried away one or two feathers and smoothed out all traces of the struggle.

In the middle of the lake, where the waves were higher, a solitary skiff was floating with neither man, nor oars, nor sail. This lonely skiff, with nobody on board, was as pitiful a sight as a horse without a driver plunging helplessly into a ravine. It was a dangerous thing to do with our long, narrow boat, but we made up our minds to go over and see what was the matter, perhaps there had been an accident; but suddenly a man appeared from the bottom of the boat, took the oars, and pulled the skiff to face the wind.

We yelled with delight when we saw the man appear, and although we knew quite well it was only a tired fisherman taking a nap in the bottom of his boat, it didn't matter: we had wanted to see the man appear with our own eyes, and we had seen him.

THE EYES OF THE EARTH

TOWARDS evening it became so still that the leaves on the birches hardly moved. Along the road below the Gremyachaya hill a crowd of country people were walking and riding in carts. On the gravel path at the side of the road I saw the tiny traces of a child's foot, so fine and delicate that if I had not been afraid of their laughter I would have bent down and kissed it.

As the folks were riding together down on the road they were chattering from one cart to another, and their words, after striking the calm waters of the lake, were reflected up to the Gremyachaya hill. Nearly every cart had a young colt running beside it. The peasants were talking about who had planted potatoes; how a certain Dmitri Pavlov had lost his wife, and not being able to wait the proper six months, he had married again, but what could he do otherwise?—there were six children. How Maria was engaged to Yakov Grigoriev; she was forty, and he sixty, but she, Maria, had a little calf. The folk in the last cart didn't quite catch what it was Maria had, and the words were passed down along the procession: 'A lit-tle calf!' Then it was so quiet that the booming of the water-bull in the reeds could be heard seven versts away.

Later a village woman with her little boy came down to the

lake with her washing, and the boy, lifting up his tiny shirt, began to relieve himself in the water. The woman's voice was heard as clearly as if she had been standing at our side:

'What are you doing, you wicked boy, in your mother's eye?'

Did that mean she thought the lake was the eye of Mother Earth? As I always do in cases like this, I asked the Lady Berendeyevna what she thought.

'Yes, of course,' she said. 'Only they carry it over to mean people; if a woman's eye begins to hurt, the villagers say that her little boy has no doubt been relieving himself in the water.'

This is the way an old pagan cult degenerates among these Berendeans; the poetic idea of the eyes of Mother Earth passes over into the common culture of mankind, while they only keep the superstitions.

It was impossible to sleep through the scented night, and the eyes of Mother Earth were never closed.

THE SECRETS OF THE EARTH

The finest view of Lake Pleshcheyevo was from the top of Yarila's Bald Patch on the Alexandrova hills, where the town of Kleshchin once stood. At that time the lake itself was called Kleshchino. Prince Yuri Dolgoruki[1] rebuilt the town on the marshes near the mouth of the river Trubejh, and the new town became as famous as the old Kleshchin. The building of the town started with the church, which has been preserved to this day, and as a monument of the twelfth century it is very important in the history of art. Since then so many churches and monasteries have grown up round the old cathedral that it is possible, by studying the remains, to reconstruct with very few gaps almost the entire course of Russian history for many centuries. Now the lake was open I often went by boat from Botik to the fisherman's colony at Trubejh to get supplies from the bazaar in the middle of the town. The boys did the rowing while I steered, musing on the ruins of the past. Sometimes this was quite pleasant, but I am not very fond of im-

[1] Prince of Rostov-Suzdal, *d.* 1157.

mersing myself in an alien period, and I noticed sometimes that I was looking at these silent and motionless ruins with something like hatred, especially since so many of them were in very poor taste, and often I would notice near one of the old houses the priest sitting on the bench with his aged wife, chewing sunflower seeds and dull with boredom. But in spite of this capricious attitude every time I went into the bazaar for supplies I would ask the fishermen about this church or that, and about the priests. One day I was talking about a deserted church when the conversation turned to different kinds of boat; I was explaining that it was dangerous to go right out into the middle of the lake in my light 'Usolski' boat, yet I wanted to sail right across. All the fishermen said unanimously:

'You must go and see the parson.'

It turned out that the old church I had been talking about had only recently been abandoned; first the deacon went and the services were taken alone by a priest named Philya, who was even glad the deacon had left. Then when the clerk and the verger left, parson Philya intoned the services and even swept the building, and was happier than ever. In this way he served the church till the last member of the congregation left; then he finally gave the services up and took to the lake, bringing loads of wood and passengers from all parts of the forest.

'It would be a good idea to go and see the parson,' said the fishermen. 'No matter where you want to go: to the Volga, even down to Astrakhan, he'll take you; he's very strong, cheerful, and a very good chap.'

After this not one of these trips for supplies was complete without somebody telling me something fresh about this priest: how on one occasion he was helping the bishop for a fee of three roubles, but when the Procession of the Cross was passing through the bazaar his attention was attracted to some unusually large bass on one of the stalls; how he forgot all about the procession and was so busy with the fishmonger and the fish that by the time he remembered it the procession was out of sight and he had to run hard to catch up with it. Another fisherman spoke of his passion for assisting at fires, and the number of people whose lives he had helped to save. Now he spent all his time on the lake, and was so devoted to it that when he was offered a good living a short time ago he had refused it; while his family lived

in the deepest poverty and the mother had to go out to work in the factory.

I became so interested in this parson that at length I was asking everybody about him, and was told by our historian that on one occasion he acted in the courts as defence counsel for some of the fishermen, with a skill and a knowledge of the fisherman's mind that few others could have shown, and that generally speaking he was a remarkable fellow, not answering to the usual standards.

'Is he a believer?' I asked.

'What do you mean?' was the reply. 'He is a very honest fellow, as straight as the shaft of a cart, upright and trustworthy, but he hasn't any brains. But what does that matter? We all have our failings; here you have a parson gifted with extraordinary physical strength, and although he is nearly sixty, he still keeps going very well.'

It was queer that after hearing so much about him I never once thought of going over one day and asking him about the names of the rivers and village boundaries and the legends connected with them. In fact a very long and involved chain of circumstances was necessary to get in touch with him and arrange a trip in his celebrated boat.

THE EXPEDITION WITH THE PARSON

The historian and I had been discussing for some time the idea of investigating the pagan ritual known as the Nettle Festival, celebrated in one of the remoter villages. I had been hoping to complete my observations of the spring with a study of this ritual, which was connected with the moment of the most intense development of the productive powers of nature. We were thinking of walking through some of the larger swamps on foot, and for that reason I had asked another unemployed parson, who was getting some sort of a living for himself as a cobbler, to make me a pair of watertight boots. He agreed to do this for me on condition I went with him to choose the leather. We went to a private shop in the bazaar, and as we were handling and trying the various skins a fisherman's

wife came into the store, bowed to the priest, and asked the storekeeper whether it was true that the bell had been taken from St. Barbara's church and sold.

'That is so,' answered the shopkeeper. 'They've taken it away to Moscow.'

'There are plenty of bells in Moscow,' said the fishwife. 'Where are they going to put it?'

The shopkeeper winked at the priest and replied:

'In the Sandunov baths.'

'I don't believe you,' said the fishwife.

'All right, you needn't,' the shopkeeper replied.

This convinced her and she asked what they wanted a bell for in the baths.

'There's a rule in Moscow,' said the shopkeeper, 'that when the bell rings they all go to the baths.'

At this time I was paying very little attention to the shopkeeper's joke; I had my own way of humouring the religious folk, but when I went later for my boots I heard them saying in the bazaar:

'That bell from St. Barbara's never got there. The cart broke down on the way and it sat there in the middle of the road: "Why," it said, "are you taking me to the baths? I'm not going." And it didn't go. They began to examine it and found that it had been hung on the smaller lugs, while the large lugs were split, and since it had hung in the belfry on the smaller lugs from time immemorial, and couldn't be used in the baths except on the big lugs, the Muscovites said: "We don't want a thing like that. Take it back again." While in the museum they replied: "You should have seen that when you bought it; we've had the money and don't want to hear any more about it."'

After hearing this tale I went to the museum and was told that the bell, not having any historical value for the museum, had been sold to a village in the Moscow province, and although it was quite true it had split on the way, and the big lugs were actually found to be useless, there had been no dispute about it, and it appeared they were taking it on further.

We all had a good laugh at this cock-and-bull story, and I suggested that it wouldn't be a bad idea to pick up a few roubles from the sale of these bells to help pay for our excursion. It turned out, however, that if we set about it the right way we

could get even more, and thus go further; along the edge of the Kubri, somewhere in that neighbourhood we should find the Zhdanov hills, where according to the old chronicles the Suzdal and Novgorod armies fought a very famous battle, which revealed the growing strength of the Suzdal province and saw that birth of Greater Russia. No doubt there would still be traces of this encounter in the Zhdanov hills, and it would be nice to do some excavating there. It would also be very nice to take some of the young naturalists to do the work, and Serge Sergeyitch the zoologist to study the fauna of the Kubri; then we had a young artist, and a photographer, a botanist, and a geologist. . . .

So it all grew and grew, till it developed into a proper expedition; first one boat was insufficient, then two; the proceeds from the sale of the bells swelled up to fifty roubles, but even fifty roubles seemed little enough for what we wanted to do, so Mikhail Ivanovitch had an idea. It was not so much a question of keeping down expenses, what attracted him was that this suggested voyage would follow the ancient river routes of the peoples of distant times, who had left on the river banks their neolithic settlements, palisades, and tumuli.

'Let's all go together in a big boat!' said the director.

And immediately:

'Let's go with the parson!'

From this moment we began to make serious preparations for the expedition, but from whatever angle the others looked at it, I always connected it in my mind with the unusual parson and his boat.

THE RUN OF THE PERCH

If we had called our trip into the wilds of Pereslavl province a simple excursion we would have had some difficulty in attracting the young people to join us; the word excursion, since that sort of thing had been introduced into the school curriculum, had lost its fascination; but as soon as we called it the expedition with the parson, not only the young naturalists attached themselves to us, but one or two other students, whom, to distinguish them from the young wild-life observers, we called the 'Robinsons'. The young naturalists drew maps under

the guidance of their elders, learned how to measure altitudes with a barometer, how to calculate the flow of the streams, and how to stuff and ring birds. The Robinsons were more attracted by the adventurous side of the undertaking, and occupied themselves with provisioning the party. Petya succumbed to their influence and took to making fishing-rods. He proposed to supply the entire expedition with fish, and started by trying his hand at deep-water angling, which was a new sport for him. It had been raining hard all the morning. When it cleared four boats were visible on the lake, lying at anchor opposite Nadgorod. Petya was out fishing, and lay not far from them—a fifth fly on the water. Then the sun was hidden again; over at Zazerya the water was like silver, but near us more like steel. The wind rose again, and everything went black. A huge cloud came up and the strip of silver disappeared; the whole lake was like cast-iron now, with a white scum on the waves. The boats were continually appearing and disappearing on the cast-iron surface. Then the rain came down again, as if it were being poured out of a bucket.

I waited patiently under a tree on Gremyachaya hill for the light to return, and when the rain stopped and the sky cleared, there were the boats once more. I went home reassured, and told them: 'He's all right.' That day the rain came and went four or five times, and the boats appeared and were lost again four or five times. In the evening Petya came in wet through, and we made some fish soup with the perch he had caught.

THE ROBINSONS

EVERY third day we met and discussed our plans for the expedition. All the experts had their own particular theme except me; I was the only person without one. In my descriptions of the countryside I use my innate ability to combine personal observations, impressions from life and from my reading, presenting them all in the person known in the story books as the hero. In the last resort this hero is myself, and fashioned out of my own thoughts and feelings. But instead of transferring these thoughts and feelings to an imaginary being,

I impose them on the countryside I am describing, so that, in effect, it becomes a living being. I considered that this simple method would not fail me here, and in describing my encounter with the countryside, I could paint a picture which would be far more effective than merely bringing together the observations of the scientists, studying the country according to their various specialities. So I looked on my position as at the very least equal in status to that of the scientific experts.

While we elders were discussing our themes, the young observers of nature—both the Robinsons and the naturalists—were quiet, but as soon as the problem of supply arose, the Robinsons immediately came into their own. In the first place it seemed likely that if the entire crowd of fifteen people went in Father Philemon's large lake boat with all our gear, it would be impossible to navigate her in the shallow rivers, so we should have to take at least four river boats instead. Then we realized that if our muscular parson didn't come with us, we should have to do all the rowing ourselves, and that wouldn't leave much time for science. After a long debate we decided to hire Father Philemon's boat, but not to put more than seven persons in her, splitting up the remainder into two light river craft. Then there was the matter of oars: it would be impossible for us to scull for long periods, like the fishermen, as we were unaccustomed to the fisherman's oar, so we should have to make some oars of our own at once for rowing. Mikhail Ivanovitch suggested using some of the money from the sale of the bells for this, but the students objected to the expense, and knowing the ways of the lake from childhood, they decided that as soon as they reached the forest they would cut a tree down and make their own. There was no trouble about tents or instruments—barometers, thermometers, wind-measuring instruments, nets and drags, entomological apparatus, guns—we managed to find them all.

One more question: Would it be possible to fish in the close season with a drag-net? The student's answer: 'Who's going to stop us in the middle of the uninhabited marshes?' Another problem: Could we shoot a moulting drake or grouse in the close season for food? The Robinsons replied that in case of need we were entitled to kill the village sheep, let alone a wild duck. Finally they decided not to waste money on separate cooking-pots, but to take two horse-troughs for the entire community.

We, the elders, looked hard at one another, and somebody murmured:

'It's going to be rather a lark.'

THE DEPARTURE OF THE EXPEDITION

With all the naturalists and one Robinson in my boat I went straight across the lake from Botik, and we all met at Ureva. Polya went over to the Fisherman's Colony for her boots, and when she came back she described the terrible scene she had witnessed there: two delegates from the Robinsons had asked Father Philemon to allow them to fix rowlocks in his boat for their oars, but he not only refused to let them spoil his boat, but after the quarrel it looked as if he would resign from the expedition altogether.

My naturalists were in great alarm; if the parson wasn't coming somebody would have to be left behind. Thus the parson, still unknown to me, had already taken on a rather fabulous role in the expedition.

The pollen from the flowering trees and meadows, and the debris from the woods, covered the water of the lake in a thin continuous layer; in the early morning light the lake looked as if it needed a good wash. Our boat left a distinct trail on it, and the birds as well, and when a fish rose it made a clear circle in the water. . . .

The sun poured its rays across the lake, and Yarila's Bald Patch looked down on us from the Alexandrova hills; a splendid augury, for to me the principal aim of our voyage was to study what was left of the cult of the old fertility god Yarila.

Under the white veil of morning the lake lay perfectly still, and a distant boat moved across the water like a fly on the counterpane. Could that be Father Philemon? No, the boat was too small; besides, there was only one, if it had been ours, there would have been two together.

From Botik we had already passed Kurotyen and the entire length of the Zakhap when, on the far side of the lake opposite the Alexandrova hills, we caught sight of the parson's boat, and behind her on the quiet water, flying the red flag, the smaller

boat with the Robinsons. Both were as close to the shore as possible; the parson sculling and the Robinsons rowing; the old man had evidently stuck to his guns and had forbidden them to install rowlocks in his boat. They were moving at good speed and when we caught them up by the reed-beds both groups found themselves at an equal distance from Ureva. So our lads began to row as hard as they could, and at last I came in sight of the formidable parson sculling his long, dug-out pirogue. He was very tall and spare, and wore a grey coat and straw hat. His beard was of an indeterminate colour, probably going grey. In a word—a priest, as priests go—but flying the red flag. A mass of stuff lay in the bows of the boat, and the entomologist had already installed himself there, and was waving his net in search of insects. Mikhail Ivanovitch sat in the middle, like a queen bee. Behind him the young artist Boris Ivanovitch worked hard at the oar, helping the parson, while on a separate seat sat a red-faced old man with a white beard.

We raced neck and neck to Ureva, and coming ashore, received the bad news that the geologist had let us down. He had not arrived from Moscow and had not brought the camera plates we had ordered. The botanist had also cried off, but all this bad news was forgotten in the announcement that quite unexpectedly the famous archaeologist Academician Spitsin had joined us, and would help us to excavate the settlements and barrows of prehistoric man. The red-faced old man must be Spitsin himself, then.

I was particularly glad of this, because up to that time there had been two conspicuous gaps in my experience of life: I had never flown in an aeroplane and had never helped an archaeologist in his digging. Yet quite unexpectedly we were going to delve into the secrets of the earth under the direction of the great Spitsin himself; which was at least one ancient wish fulfilled.

THE PATHFINDERS' CANAL

WHAT were we going to call our dug-out vessel, on which had devolved the high honour of making this remarkable and fascinating voyage on the Nerl and Kubri rivers? The boat carrying the young naturalists named itself the *Pathfinder*, while the students' was known, of course, as *Robinson*; but there was quite a discussion over the third boat: some wanted to call her the *Parson's Wife*, others *Matushka*, while some suggested *The Tub.*

Parson Philya rested on his scull, tall, thin, his smiling face scored by wrinkles like sabre cuts; he was thoroughly enjoying himself!

Mikhail Ivanovitch, however, suggesting that *The Tub* would perhaps be a reflection on Father Philemon's old lady, proposed the name the *Frigate Pallada.* We finally decided that the boat should keep its own name *Matushka*, but that we must all work together in such a way that after our voyage the *Matushka* would be entitled to be called the *Pallada.*[1]

The zoologist had already started to cast his net among the plants on the bank, and when he inspected the contents, he grinned happily; the harvest was unusual, there was a remarkably high proportion of the kind of thing he was looking for. There and then he emptied the contents of his net into his collecting boxes; the beetles jumped all over the place and were transferred to jam-jars. One or two of the Robinsons went after game, while others, under the zoologist's direction, collected water-beetles and various plant seeds. The Pathfinders, after taking the barometer reading, set out their appartaus for measuring the flow of the water, and finally measured the width of the river Veksi as it fell into the lake.

Thus we were working like a real expedition, rather than a school excursion, for all this was being done not merely as a subject of knowledge, but actually for information. Every fact we learned: the speed of the current, the width of the river's mouth, etc.—all these things were new and useful. It appeared that the name Ureva given to the mouth of the river was not peculiar to

[1] This vessel is as famous in Russia as Shackleton's *Discovery* or Nansen's *Fram* is in Western Europe.

it, but was the name generally given to the mouth of any river falling into a lake. Veksi, the name of the river, was also not a name in itself, but appeared to be given to any river connecting two lakes, as the Veksi did between Pleshcheyevo and Syomino.

When it leaves the lake, the Veksi makes a number of sharp turns, and bends round more and more, so that travellers along adjacent curves could almost touch one another. The whole river was like this, and it was remarkable that nobody had thought of cutting a short channel from one curve to another. We decided to open our expedition with a try at this, so we landed on the bank and set to work with spades. The old parson was very enthusiastic about it; he had often travelled that way with his loads of wood, and said he would have cut a channel through long ago, if he had not been afraid of the people round about, who were so superstitious that they would be capable of wringing your neck for much less than that. In something like twenty minutes we dug out our canal, working with iron shovels and oars, and when the water rushed through, the Pathfinders' boat floated through on its own accord. The Robinsons too had no trouble with their boat, but *Matushka* grounded about half-way and stopped up the channel. We all got together and pulled her free. When the boat was clear the water rushed in to take its place, leaving the curved banks like islands on either side.

Our old parson remarked:

'If this had been done by anybody else, I would have given them a five-rouble piece myself.'

For this reason we called the island 'The Fiver', and the new channel the 'Pathfinders' Canal'. At this solemn moment Serge Sergeyitch read aloud his 'March of the Pathfinders', which he had composed only the day before. The Robinsons sang it to the tune of 'The Girl of Warsaw', and rowing cheerfully behind their Red flag, chanted:

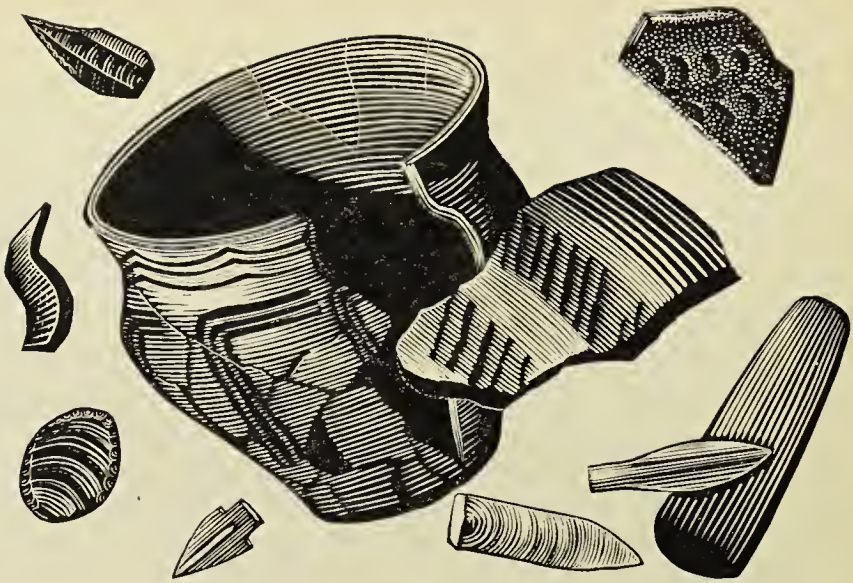
'Pathfinders all, to glorious victory!'

The archaeologist remarked:

'Let's hope it keeps fine for it!'

Our parson replied:

'My corns are beginning to pinch!'



A SETTLEMENT OF PRIMITIVE MAN

At the present time the expanse of forest and swamp encircled by the Greater Nerl and Kubri rivers is practically uninhabited, but thousands of years ago, in the time of Neolithic man, these streams had been explored by the primitive hunters and fishermen, who had settled there for considerable periods. Leaving the boggy sources of the lake streams on one side, as soon as you come to the first patch of dry meadow, where the fishermen land and build their fires, you can say that without any doubt here, on the site of the present fishermen's camp fire, those other fishermen of the Stone Ages had their settlement and had left their stratified remains behind them.

On the Veksi we tied up to the first dry bank where you could walk firmly, and in the clear water we could see a dark layer in the sand, quite possibly of some significance. This opening in the forest was known as Poltso, or clearing, for it had been under the plough comparatively recently. Even before they reached the bank our Pathfinders and Robinsons began to pull scraps of pottery out of the water, pieces of flint with the traces of man's handiwork upon them, and stone axe-heads. On Poltso itself our first finds were due to the archaeological labours of the moles. We all rushed ashore and searched the dark-coloured mole-hills, and

in every one we found potsherds, flint scrapers, arrow-heads, and hand-axes.

Seeing so much material turned up merely by the moles, our archaeologist remarked:

'That will do for now. We must start a proper dig; I've never seen such a find in the whole of Russia!'

One person starts a dig with an ordinary iron spade. Lyova started digging with such zeal that it looked as if he would soon come out at the other end of the earth, but it was not long before the clay subsoil and water appeared.

The archeologist said:

'What you have to do now is make a section, like cutting cheese with a knife.'

This cross-section clearly revealed the top darker layer, then the sand, then another dark layer, then sand again. The dark, intermediate layer was called, apparently, the 'burial deposit'.

Lyova made the suggestion:

'This burial deposit must belong to the Old Stone Age?'

'Possibly,' replied the archaeologist.

Without saying another word he walked over to the bank of the river, then across to the mouth of another stream overgrown with rushes, then into the wood itself, had a good look round, meditated for some time, then came back and said:

'It is more than likely this was then the shore of Lake Pleshcheyevo.'

The Robinsons and Pathfinders goggled at this suggestion of the chief Pathfinder. Lyova asked:

'How many thousands of years ago would that be?'

'I don't like this talk of thousands,' replied the old Pathfinder. 'Say, rather, that it must have been a long time ago.'

'What was the country like in those days?'

'Probably the lake came up as far as this, and there were no rivers. Then, probably because of a change of climate, the lake was unable to retain all the water, and the rivers began to flow. That's how the Volga started. It was probably about this time that one lake started to flow into the next. During this period primitive man settled on the banks of the lakes and rivers, making a living by catching fish. That was the Old Stone Age. Later the shore of the lake became the bank of the river, and once again the site was suitable for fishermen, and since the upper layers of

the new settlement give us pottery, it will belong to the New Stone Age. So you see, boys, that we don't talk about thousands of years, but simply that one period is older or newer than another, and as far as I am concerned the finds themselves are not so important as the layer they happen to be in. Now, Lyova, start your section and keep the finds in four divisions; put the material from the first layer on this side, those from the second layer over there, and so on, and put the lowest finds of all on this paper.'

Lyova made his section as he had been told, and handed the professor a tiny scrap of pottery of unburnt clay, scored with lines and covered with knobs as large as peas, with as much care and reverence as if it had been a precious gold vessel from a Scythian 'kurgan'. As for me, I was not sure whether I didn't prefer this fragment of rude pottery to all the golden work of the Scythians. After examining the piece closely, stroking it and almost caressing it, the old scholar said happily:

'This is a very early type.'

'What about this one?'

'Much later. Look—you see that checker pattern? That shows it is later. But it is very nice, we don't happen to have much of this later work.'

The children soon noticed, however, that although the newer work was more valuable from a scientific point of view, the older fragments seemed more to the taste of the old scholar, so they naturally tried to find as much of the older pottery as they could. It was not long before they were talking in the proper archaeological jargon, calling the pieces of pottery 'sherds' and sorting them out according to cultures; this was Phatyanov culture, and that Dyakov type. . . .

'You said that the name of the culture comes from the most typical site where the finds are made. That means, I suppose, that we could call this the Pereslavl culture?'

'That is quite possible, of course, and in any case this site will become quite famous.'

We used the same tree-fork for our tea kettle as the old fishermen had used for theirs, and as we drank our tea we noticed on the ground near the camp fire a fish-bone left by a present-day fisherman and not far away a piece of pottery covered with the knobs and lines of Neolithic man. All this time the old scholar

went on sorting and sorting his pottery by cultures, comparing it with the various flints and hand-axes, and it all seemed to work out properly, almost as if he himself were in the Old Stone Age and was working with flint tools.

'This looks like the mark of primitive man's finger-nails,' remarked one of the Pathfinders.

'Very likely it is. Everything was done by hand in those days. What is more, it is very likely the mark of a woman's hand.'

'What makes you think that?'

'You can tell that from the ornament. Where you have ornament and pattern, there you have the hand of woman. Besides, you can sometimes tell by the fingerprints themselves.'

'Then this piece of pottery certainly has the traces of finger-nails on it.'

'Why certainly? Just say—very likely.'

'But what sort of people were they?'

'We don't know. At present we don't know what these people were like, nor even the name of the tribe that lived here.'

By the camp fire the learned scholar enlarged on his theories, and it was clearly the ambition of a lifetime for him to find out something definite about this old and mysterious race of men.

We all listened intently, with the sole exception of Father Philemon, who wandered up and down the settlement, incapable of staying still for long at a time, and wanting to find something for himself. Here he comes again, beaming all over, with an unusual find.

'Excuse me,' said Father Philemon, holding out a small round object in his hand, 'this looks like the spout of a teapot. They must have drunk tea.'

Not only did they not drink tea, but had barely reached the stage of using fire from a tree struck by lightning. Even the clay vessels we had found in fragments were not used as cooking pots, but merely for keeping food and water.

Father Philemon listened to all this with great respect, but it was clear that he was asking with the whole of his sceptical being: 'But who has actually seen all this?'

I could see that living as he did on an instinctive level, he would actually have to see the man's own face and features to be able to talk about him, and if this was impossible, he was quite incapable of reconstructing him from pieces of pottery, com-

paring one piece against another, as the scholars do. He had to visualize primitive man more immediately, starting from himself. . . .

We all laughed over the teapot spout, but to me it seemed that Father Philemon, at least in principle, was partly in the right. For even the old scholar himself, demonstrating to the boys the uses of the different tools and stone implements, took his examples from present-day craftsmen: masons, carpenters, and blacksmiths. But to be bolder still, to seek the creative fire in the person of modern man, and then to transfer it to that genius who first stumbled on the use of fire, and to do this in such a manner that this hairy genius may seem in even greater contrast to the present-day apes, smothered by their own creations. . . .

This excavating business was very attractive, and I should have liked to have spent more time at it, but I noticed the mist rising over the river, and suggested we make a move; perhaps we might find another settlement on Lake Syomino, a Bronze Age camp this time.

EARLY MAN

Not far from Poltso, on the opposite bank of the Veksi, there was a magnificent grove of tall pines, but from time to time some of these enormous trees had fallen from the high bank and leaned out right over the water; occasionally one would fall and capsize any boat that happened to be too near the bank. There were also a number of small streams issuing from the grove, making almost parallel sandbanks in the middle of the river channel. So, perhaps, in olden times, the merchant trader from Novgorod, passing these dreaded sandbanks, had been caught by the trees, and had sought refuge on the island, but on the island there was a small spinney, and out of the spinney would come Tat, the bandit. This terror of the woods is enshrined in the name of the island—Tatin (bandit's) Spinney. We managed to negotiate the hanging pines successfully, and nobody attacked us from the wood. Then Usolya appeared, the famous village known throughout the length and breadth of Greater Russia for its salt manufacture. On the river bank we

could see the low hill known as Goat's Hill, and the ruins of the famous refineries, which supplied salt at one time to the whole of Russia.

At Usolya we encountered our first mill-dam. We had to unload the boats and then carry them over. During this strenuous and tedious business the local peasants marvelled at our guns and bags, our parson, and our Red Flag, and gathered round and asked us who we were and what we were up to. When we told them, one old man asked:

'But what's the good of it all?'

At the same time Serge Sergeyitch was asking another group of peasants all about the insect pests of the fields and woods, and his lively, informative talk attracted their interest to such an extent that when a newcomer arrived and asked again that same question about the purpose of the expedition, one peasant told him, with a laugh:

'The good of it is the good it does to your pocket.'

After rowing along the course of the river for about an hour and still not losing sight of Usolya, we at last entered the dying lake of Syomino, about one and a half versts long, and not more than an oar-blade deep, but the mud below was extraordinarily

thick; the whole oar would sink in and could not be pulled out again. If there were an accident, and the boat were to capsize, it would be impossible to escape; you would be pulled down into the soft mud. A terrible place, but a paradise for duck.

Exactly as on the river Veksi, at the first dry place where it was possible to land we found a Neolithic settlement, and here, in the right angle of the lake, where a piece of dry land rose up like a table covered with cakes, was Torgovische. Here, of course, came Sadko himself, the rich merchant from Greater Novgorod, leaving the poor cornfields of the north in search of the Suzdal grain-bearing land; here he cooked his fish-soup, just as we did, but paid no attention to the Stone Age pottery revealed by the moles; in those distant days the idea of such a thing as prehistoric pottery had not entered their heads.

The Robinsons landed on the settlement and put up two tents; the old priest started a camp fire, set up a cooking pot for the gruel, and we all sat round in the smoke, to keep the mosquitoes away. While the light lasted the entomologist busied himself with sorting out his dead beetles and spreading them out on paper. Suddenly he shouted:

'Look! There's a bat! We haven't got one in the museum. Kill it!'

And in the twilight we began the tricky sport of shooting bats.

A light shone across the lake, turning into a resin torch, then a boat pulled up to the bank and two fishermen, with harpoons in their hands, came up to the camp fire. Any kind of fishing, especially the use of lights, was forbidden in that particular month, but in an outlying place like this they don't pay much attention to the law—however, they were afraid of the authorities and had come to find out who we really were, as we were flying the Red Flag.

They informed us that the most important fish in that stagnant and overgrown lake were not the tough fish, such as pike or perch, but the soft fish, tench and carp. Besides the more usual methods, they have here their own way of fishing, only possible in such muddy, reedy water. One of these is known as 'na var'. You push an oar into the mud, and when the scared fish struggles out of the slime, its track is shown on the surface by a line of bubbles, like boiling water ('var'); when the bubbling stops, they put down the net or impale the fish on the harpoon. The second

method, 'na piltsu', is much the same, only instead of going by the bubbles, they follow the track of the fish by the disturbed mud ('pil'). A third method, 'na shar', is simply feeling for them in the mud.

One of the fishermen, Pavl by name, explained all this to us in short, practical, and vivid phrases. Others would have used long words and complicated explanations, but he just said:

'I poke the oar in, and the young pike bubbles out.'

I made use of this clear narrative to show our young naturalists how to improve their descriptive style in their nature observations.

These two young fishermen were very much alike, they could almost be taken for brothers, but Pavl had large, grey, and thoughtful eyes, while those of Nikolai were just narrow slits. Pavl almost never smiled, but Nikolai was a giggler. Pavl was trying the whole time to catch one of the bats alive, but Nikolai flinched every time one came his way.

It appeared that Pavl had read the book on Pereslavl written by Mikhail Ivanovitch, besides many other similar books. He informed us that not very far away, at a place called Barmazov in the Stulov hills, there was a large group of tumuli, in all probability Stone Age barrows, and that near Khemlnika village there were an old tomb and two other mounds; one of these had been opened by Nikolai, and they sounded like the real thing. Nikolai had been looking for buried gold, and had no interest in skeletons, so that when he saw something round in the barrow, he pounced on it hurriedly, picked it up, and froze with horror—since the find turned out to be a dead man's skull! He dropped it at once and took to his heels. Pavl, hearing about this, buried the skeleton again and somebody erected a wooden cross over it. This occurred over a year ago, but Nikolai was still afraid to go near the place.

Without paying the slightest attention to Nikolai, who was sitting side by side with him, Pavl summed it up:

'Living in the forest, these people are as stupid and as superstitious as primitive man.'

As he said this I remembered my theories about primitive man at Poltso, and asked:

'What makes you think primitive man must always have been stupid and superstitious? Surely they were very much like us, all

very different from one another; you yourself come from a primitive forest village, yet you have no prejudices at all, and think Nikolai is stupid because of his superstition.'

'I must have been different from the others, in some way,' replied Pavl. 'I did a lot of reading at school, and after school I tried to arrange my life so as to get plenty of time for more. The land—that is what keeps us in darkness. The land offers us nothing but hard work, but if you want to live, you have to be a craftsman—carpenter, cooper, or tar-boiler. But if working on the land is no good to you, then the best thing is to leave it, and take to a trade; then you have more time for reading. That's how I thought. So I decided to leave the land. Everybody said how foolish I was, but I didn't listen to them, and I am no worse off than they are, and I can read as much as I want to. That's how I live—in my own way and after my own fashion.

In telling us all this Pavl himself seemed to have no idea that there was anything commendable about it, and that living and thinking for yourself showed any special virtue; he just told us the plain facts, probably without knowing whether it was good or bad.

This information about burial mounds from such a level-headed fellow as Pavl could hardly be ignored, so we immediately decided to take our archaeological group over the next day and make a thorough investigation. Pavl volunteered to help with the digging, and Nikolai as well. We warned him that we were looking for skeletons, not money; but he stuck to his guns; he would help Pavl with the digging. Then, in complete darkness, we took our places in the two tents; in the small one the older naturalists and some of the Pathfinders, in the larger one all the Robinsons and the old priest. Serge Sergeyitch was the only one of us with a proper felt sleeping-bag, into which he crawled up to his neck, while we lay on the groundsheets, covering ourselves with coats and anything else we could find; none of us were properly fitted up yet. It was great fun to sleep on the bare earth, but we were rather afraid of the possibility of wind and rain.

Serge Sergeyitch remarked from the depths of his bag:

'The barometer fell six points to-day!'

And the parson, referring to his corns:

'They're hurting like mad!'

It was a couple of hours or more before I finally got off to sleep, and in this half-dozing state my half-thoughts and half-feelings were occupied with this question of Stone Age man. But he appeared to me not like the man we were told about at school; not as an ape-like creature, but as he is shown by the relation between these two fishermen, Pavl and Nikolai. It seemed to me that in the process of creation Nikolai was thrown out as a finished object, to exist unchanged, just as he was; while Pavl went forward; that Pavl, in his narrow environment, would invent fire, like his genius of an ancestor; that one was a man, and the other an ape. But since skulls and scraps of pottery all looked very much alike, you would never guess from them which of the two would achieve progress and which merely chewed his food. This was the only reason, as far as I could see, for collecting skulls and pottery, to get as near in thought to the existence of primitive man. But in order to understand him fully, it was necessary, while studying the ancient remains, to study modern man just as closely, in his creative efforts for the future; and it was very likely, in that case, that of all the members of our expedition the one nearest to the life of primitive man was this professor.

The skull is like a room occupied by the brain, and we, being used to working mentally in a room of this sort, create an even larger skull for the head; but when you spend a night in the forest, it seems that the mind works in a much broader and less limited fashion, but without aim or responsibility, like the wind or the rain. . . . Then the cold and the damp came, and the forest murmur began—and suddenly my thoughts changed.

I looked out through the door of the tent. The sky was overcast, and a cold drizzle had begun, only by the fresh green of the trees was it possible to be sure that it was spring and not autumn. I was going to close my eyes again and indulge myself with more of my half-thoughts about primitive man, when suddenly the tarpaulin of the other tent was pushed aside and a shaggy head appeared, with a beard of an indefinite colour, but with the clear eyes of the forest-dweller in the creases of the wind-blown face. I could hardly imagine this back-to-Nature parson beginning his day with prayer; in any case there was no need for him to come out of the tent just for this. In this assumption I appeared to be correct, for, paying no attention to the

drizzle, he crawled out of the tent on all fours in his jacket and boots, pulled his parson's cloak out after him and put it on, becoming a real priest in appearance, then bent down to the remains of last night's camp-fire and started to blow it back to life again. He did this very skilfully and practically, shielding the fire from the rain, first with his hand, then with the frying-pan, which he wedged somehow over the embers. Then he peeled some potatoes, put them in the pan, and while they were cooking, started to clean one of the roach the fishermen had caught the night before. After eating the first panful, he made himself another, then rolled himself a large cigarette of shag tobacco and lay on his stomach on the ground, not taking the slightest notice of the damp, and the fact that it was raining fairly hard by now. Watching the lake, he lay there smoking his cigarette, happy, satisfied, and free as air, sharing his emotions with the entire universe.

Poking my head out of the tent, I called to him in a quiet voice, so as not to disturb his splendid calm:

'Fa-ther!'

He didn't even turn his head:

'What is it?'

'Father,' I said. 'I've been watching you and wondering why you didn't put the fish in the pot and make some soup, it would have been a lot easier than frying it.'

He replied without any hesitation at all:

'But roach in soup is a mournful [taskliviye] fish.'

'You mean bony [kastliviye], don't you?'

'No, mournful. You can fry roach all right, but when you make soup of it, all the time you're eating it you are wondering what is happening at home, or what may happen. . . . A mournful fish.'

'But this feeling doesn't come from the fish, surely?'

'Where else would it come from?'

'Lots of things: dissatisfaction, lack of success. . . .'

'But what have I to worry about now? I haul the firewood, carry the fishermen, cut the timber I want—I don't worry about failure. But you ask the fishermen themselves, they'll all say the same: you can't make fish-soup from roach; roach is a mournful fish.'

By this time the senior Pathfinders were awake, hearing the

murmur of the rain and feeling the dampness of the ground, but as they listened to the talk about the mournful fish, they all started to laugh, and our chat came to an end.

THE MAKING OF MAN

The Stulov hills, to which Pavl and Nikolai were leading us, lie buried in the depths of the Barmazov forest, not far from the log road three versts long, actually a bridge over the liquid swamp and the beginning of the road to the Polovetz province. To the right of this road the stream known as the Chertoroi appeared and disappeared into the swamp again, while to the left, through the dark woods, flowed the river Lada; all this part of the forest, the thickest and most neglected part of all, was called Zaladyevo (beyond the Lada). Barmazov had been at one time one of the most thickly populated and flourishing districts, but in the time of Ivan the Terrible, owing to cold and famine and pillage, the inhabitants had either died out or left the district, and since then the forest had taken over. The older people spoke of a wooden church which had been completely overgrown by the woods, whose belfry had been drowned; but if you were good, you could sometimes hear the notes of the drowned bells.

The tumuli on the Stulov hills were longer than they were wide, and by all appearance were burial mounds of some kind, but when our archaeologists tested their direction by compass it appeared that they were aligned from south to north instead of from east to west. But in spite of this the evidence of human handiwork was so obvious that we decided to start digging.

On these graves we were to study the correct way to organize an excavation, so each one had his task defined from the start. Mikhail Ivanovitch was to act as chronicler; he had to measure the barrow with his tape-measure, draw the plan, keep a look-out for the original ground-level beneath the mound; finally he would draw the section of the tumulus and in general look after the scientific record. Our Academician took the part of directing the actual dig; he stood on the barrow and showed the others where to cut the trench across the main axis of the barrow.

One by one the tremendous stones were removed, and we all thought, after each stone, which was more difficult than the one before, that the mound itself would soon appear; and in time we did get down to the sand, and we all started to work with the spades. Then it rained; and the rain came down without ceasing. We were all wet through and covered with mud.

'I have never known such a difficult barrow,' remarked the foreman of the works.

'I suppose it really is a barrow?' said Lyova.

'It is certainly the work of man.'

Once more we set to work, and now once more we had to remove stone after stone. Nikolai suddenly remembered that he had a hole in the roof of his hayloft. He had to hurry home, or the rain would spoil all his hay. Pavl carried on. Lyova believed what the professor had told them that bones would certainly be found.

'Suppose it is only some debris from glacial drift?'

'It could hardly be that, but we must think it over.'

The scientist walked over to a similar mound not far away, pondered, measured, and calculated. We pulled away the last stone, dug out the earth filling, cut down well into the subsoil; there was no ground-level at all; no nothing; a fir cone about the size of my little finger had fallen into the hole, and how they fastened on it, and how desperately they examined it! Mikhail Ivanovitch stood there wet and miserable. I felt sorry for him, so I asked him what his Sonia was doing with herself that day. He livened up at once and replied:

'Little Sonia's gone to Fkhutemas to take an exam.'

Lyova said that if Alexander Andreyevitch had said this was a barrow, then we ought to find some bones there.

'No, Lyova,' said the archaeologist, appearing from behind the trees, 'this is not a barrow.'

'Then we've been digging for nothing?'

'No, not at all. At least we've proved that it's not a burial mound.'

'Then what is it?'

'It's hard to say what it is. We shall have to make a special search—we can do that later. It is certainly human handiwork.'

That is how science progresses; even negative results are valuable and sometimes necessary. But we all felt as if we had

travelled the whole way to the North Pole, thinking to find something wonderful there, but had found nothing at all, except things of the mind—sextant and barometer readings. . . .

The secrets of the Barmazov forest remained secrets. So we chewed our black-bread-and-strawberry-jam, and set off for Khmelnika, where not far from the river Chertoroa there were several barrows and ancient tombs. On the way, near the Zheltukin swamps, Pavl showed us where the deserters lived: we could tell from the shavings lying about that they had spent a good time there, occupying themselves with woodwork of some kind. After the deserters had left, the huts were used by distillers of illegal liquor. We could see the holes for their stills on the banks of the stream.

The appearance of the old tomb livened us all up to some extent; it was a typical Novgorod tomb, and finding it there, so far from Novgorod itself, but so close to Torgovishche and on the way to the rich cornfields of Opolya, told us much about the history of the place. Near by we could still see the ditch and the hole Nikolai had made when he excavated the other tomb, and through the tops of the trees there below us, lay the waters of Lake Syomina.

This time everything seemed to be in order; the barrow was typical in form and behind it lay the ditch, out of which the earth had been piled up. After testing the alignment by compass, from east to west, the trench was cut across from the south, for this made it easier to see where the undisturbed floor began. But as soon as we started to dig we came across a huge stone, then another and another, and the rain came down without ceasing. . . .

The Pathfinders worked in the surrounding ditch, while Pavl and Lyova excavated the tumulus. Soon it began to get dark, but there was no sign of the ground-level. Pavl left for home on undisclosed business, and Lyova went on working by himself. I knew him of old—he was obsessed with the idea of finding a burial, and although he had been working beyond his strength for hours, he would refuse to give up till he found some bones. Suddenly a huge stone fell down from the back of the trench and in falling bruised his right hand; so the last active worker had to retire from the fight. Once again the professor, just as he had done during the digging of the first mound, walked round and round the site, and seemed lost in thought. In the meantime we

ourselves, hungry, dirty, and tired out, were beginning to doubt whether this was a tumulus either. Mikhail Ivanovitch sat on the stump of a pine.

'What are you thinking about, Mikhail Ivanovitch?'

'I was wondering whether my little Sonia will pass her exam.'

We were both trying to think of the best way to get the tireless professor away from this barrow, so that we could go over to Pavl's cottage and get something to eat and drink, and then find the hayloft. Assuming he had a hayloft.

At this point the archaeologist came up and said:

'A blister!'

What he meant by this was probably that the barrow looked from a distance something like a blister on the surface of the earth, and if that were the case, it was fairly certain to be an ancient burial mound. But by this time it was getting dark, so we asked the professor whether we couldn't finish the work next day.

'All right,' he said, 'but we shan't be long now. Give me the shovel, Lyova, and let me see what I can do.'

He jumped down into the trench, and his grey head disappeared as he started digging away. A few moments later the spade made a peculiar sound, and the grey head was completely lost to view.

'Lyova! Come here! Take the spade and try just there. Did you hear that? Sounds to me like bones.'

'Bones!'

We sprang to attention.

The thigh-bone lying across the trench was very long and dark in colour. We covered it with earth for the time being and went across to Pavl's cottage for supper in a cheerful state of confidence. In scientific work, it appears, it isn't always necessary to make a big show; sometimes a few odd bones were quite enough.

News of the find soon spread through the village, and as we sat drinking our tea round Pavl's table a number of villagers came in and sat on the benches round the wall. They sat and listened as we talked.

That evening over our tea we talked just as educated people talk between themselves, without realizing the mass of knowledge and experience gained by previous generations which entered into our modest discussion. All this was absorbed

silently by these sons of the soil over there on the benches by the wall. . . .

We talked about the south and the north; threw thousands of years about as if they were days; sometimes we looked at the earth itself as if it were a toy; sometimes, on the other hand, a trifle like the one we had just found in the barrow would lead to a long digression. Our archaeologist told us that once on a digging expedition somewhere in the south he saw with his own eyes a very small and badly worn coin, hidden under the bones, and this apparently insignificant piece of metal was sent to many scholars in the effort to identify it, with great risk of its getting lost, and in consequence losing the only reliable evidence of the period of the burial; at length they washed it in caustic soda, and found it belonged to the tenth century.

'Tenth?' came a voice from the benches. 'I've got an older coin than that, dated the year seven hundred and one.'[1]

'What sort of a coin is it?' asked the archaeologist in great surprise.

'A big copper coin; a five-copeck piece.'

The professor laughed, and said:

'You'd get a million for a coin like that.'

We all got up and went out to our sleeping quarters in the hayloft. The others soon settled down, but as I had not quite finished a pipe, I sat on a log in front of the barn and talked to Pavl. I was very keen on finding out from him how much of our discussion in the cottage had been understood by the peasants.

'You see that cloud up there, gradually fading away?' said Pavl. 'That's how their ideas disappear; it all sounds to them like a fairy story. Look at our neighbour over there, greasing the wheels of his cart. Do you recognize him?'

'That's the one who spoke about the coin, isn't it?'

'Yes. I've seen his coin—1701. He knows perfectly well it's seventeen, and not seven hundred, but now he's heard from the professor that you can get a million for a coin dated seven hundred, he gets it all mixed up in his mind, and says to himself: "Perhaps it is seven hundred, and perhaps I shall get a million for it." It would be no good showing it to the professor here in the village, for then everybody would know how rich he is—so it has to be done in secret. So he's greasing his cart, so as to go

[1] In speaking of dates in colloquial Russian the thousands are usually ignored.

up to town to-morrow. But there's nothing to go up there for, it isn't market day, but these village men—you know what they're like.'

I entered the barn and found Lyova already asleep, but he was over-tired, and was muttering in his sleep. It was always the same word: 'Viking, Viking.'

He was keeping the professor awake, so I woke him up and got him to lie down closer to me.

The professor said:

'Lyova, why do you keep on saying "Viking, Viking"?'

'Oh, Alexander Andreyevitch, I had something on my mind, but couldn't decide whether to ask you about it or not. You said that the leg-bone we found was very long, and that it was a man's leg. What I wanted to ask was: is it long for a man, this leg?'

'Yes, I think it is.'

'Then could it be a Viking? That was my theory. What do you think?'

'Most likely not, Lyova. If it were a Viking, we should have found an urn with ashes in it; the Vikings cremated their dead.'

After this Lyova went to sleep and muttered no more.

Theories about primitive man no longer kept me awake, I knew his features well by now. We all slept marvellously and woke in the happy expectation of continuing the excavation of the barrow—and then moving on to new conquests.

Fortunately the sun came out, and now the light was better we soon picked out the ground-level which had escaped observation the evening before, the trace of the turf over which the mound had been built. The section of the tumulus was now clearly revealed. We set out a line by compass from east to west over the spot where the bones had been found, and along this line we began to dig the side trench, through which we would remove the skeleton. Pavl and Lyova went on with the digging as before, and all the rest of us lay on the top of the mound, watching carefully, and every time one of us knocked the earth down into the trench with his elbow, Lyova, who had definitely taken over the leadership of the excavation, gave us a piece of his mind. Nikolai was also watching the tomb, and every now and again he would knock a lump of earth down into the trench. Something was evidently worrying him, but he gave no other signs of it.

We were now getting quite close to the skeleton, so it would be inadvisable to go on digging with the spade. Pavl came out and lay down at our side, while the professor jumped down to show Lyova how to take the earth out by hand. He then left him to it, and rejoined us on the mound. He said in passing:

'You'll come across the skull first of all.'

At this Nikolai pushed a pile of earth down into the trench.

Lyova scraped every crumb of earth away carefully by hand, showed the professor every tiny stone he came across, and every time his fingers slipped into the earth he said:

'This must be the skull.'

Again Nikolai knocked a lump of earth down with his elbow.

'You're afraid, Nikolai,' said Lyova. 'Perhaps you'd better go away.'

Then he shouted, finally, and probably correctly this time:

'The head! The head!'

The professor jumped down, cleared the place, and said:

'Yes, that's the head.'

Nikolai blenched and turned his head away. Pavl said quietly:

'Perhaps excavations like these will show us how man was produced.'

Nobody replied to this; we were all waiting impatiently to see what the skull of a man who had been lying in the earth perhaps eight hundred years would look like. As a matter of fact, it looked a good deal more imposing than I had imagined, mainly because its colour was not the usual colour of bones, but reddish, almost like copper or burnt clay; if the face had not been visible, it could have been mistaken for a small jug with a lid. But Lyova scraped the earth away carefully, and then the nose and teeth appeared, and the teeth were perfectly white. . . .

When the teeth appeared, in the general silence and close attention, Nikolai swallowed hard, then let out the syllable 'ge' higher and higher, like a siren, or better still, like a young stallion: 'ge-ge-ge-ge-e-e-e- . . .' On the highest 'ge' the horse-like whinny stopped, and it finished like:

'. . . ge-ge-e-e-mother!'

This was the cry of a man left behind by creation, with the remains of the eternal ape still left in him; a cry well known to all of us, but weird, unseemly, and yet laughable; we were horrified by it, yet we all lifted up our heads and laughed at it.

Pavl alone refrained from laughter; this was too near to him to be funny. He looked at the neighing man with his melancholy grey eyes, and said, as to an ape:

'Shut up, you fool! These excavations tell us all about the creation of man!'

There were several unusual features about this interment of the tall man with the extraordinarily strong, white teeth, and the position of some of the bones, especially those of the neck, seemed to be wrong. But the professor did not remark on this till some time later, when we were well out in the middle of the lake again. Then he made the suggestion: 'In all probability he had been hanged.'

THE SPRING OF MAN

THE RISE OF THE MAYFLY

For some reason the Drevlyans[1] gave the same name, Nerl, to two distinct rivers, one flowing through the fertile Opolya and joining the Oka, the other through the swamps of Zalessya into the Volga. On our expedition through the Syomina Lake we had used the Greater Nerl; the other is known as the Lesser Nerl. There is a portage between the two, and taken together they form the route between Zalessya and Opolya, which is probably why they both bear the same name.

Along the Greater Nerl we passed through monotonous swamps, and the river makes such wide curves that the village church of Kopnino was half the day approaching and half the day going away from us. Somewhere on the bank a young shepherd was teaching himself to play the horn, and we heard this all day in the same manner, growing louder and fading again, from morning till night.

Serge Sergeyitch's aneroid and Father Philemon's corns were in complete agreement in forecasting rain, and in fact it poured all day. But I have never known the time when not a single day is without some glimpse of beauty. Towards evening the sun came out; after such a long absence it was doubly welcome; huge boulders appeared in the river; there was a grove of trees on the high bank, and Father Philemon asked his captain for permission to land for not more than five minutes. We all wondered what parson Philya wanted on the high bank. Our measurements of the river; our tests to determine the strength of the current; the calculations of altitude from the barometer; the study of the population figures and typical occupations which we obtained from the chairmen of the village Soviets; the area of the arable land and meadows; the amount of forest set aside for cutting and regrowth; the labour force, the stock, the horses, the fowls: all this information would only give us a vague idea of the features of the countryside after a good deal of study; yet Father Philya seemed to think that he only had to jump out on the bank and

[1] Drevlyans—the name of one of the prehistoric tribes inhabiting North and Central Russia.

have a look round, and he would immediately discover a new continent.

The spot where the parson landed was indeed very lovely; a high bank with a clump of tall trees, so tall that if you looked up to the summit you were in danger of losing your hat; the river itself was covered with water-lilies. Through the green gate formed by the river plants we noticed such a wide creek that it was hard to decide which way to go; the creek was wider than the river itself and looked very attractive. But over there stand two green sentries, long slender reeds, ceaselessly swaying and bending in the current flowing between them—clearly that is the proper channel, and we must go that way.

The boredom of travelling is often redeemed by moments of quiet exaltation, when some trivial thing suddenly reveals the splendour of the world. While we were waiting for the parson's return we sat admiring the beauty of the ballet of innumerable mayflies over the water, in the slanting rays of the evening sun. These white-clad creatures, so similar to butterflies, live only for a single day, but how splendidly they enjoy the one day they choose! I was enjoying this day too; it was my particular day as well as theirs.

Suddenly from above we heard a song, as short and light as the life of the mayfly, sung by a few girlish voices. The song floated lightly down to us, and it seemed as if the mayflies were dancing to it above the water. Our Robinsons got out their mandoline and balalaika. A cart full of village girls slowly emerged from the trees to meet our little armada. Seeing the boys, the girls began to sing:

My little eyes, like little sleds,
Glide up and down the hill;
My brown, brown eyes, my little eyes,
My eyes know how to kill.

As they waited for the girls to draw level with the boats below the Robinsons strummed on their instruments, and then their improvised reply flew over the water:

I glided in my little boat,
Beneath the boat the river ran.
My darling in her snow-white coat,
Beneath the coat . . . a frying-pan.

Squeals of laughter came over the water from the trees, and then Father Philemon appeared, beaming all over, with a handful of strawberries.

'Well, Father, what did you see up there?'

'The climate here must be milder,' said Father Philemon. 'At Pereslavl the strawberries are only just in flower, but here they are nearly over.'

THE NETTLE FESTIVAL

The appearance of our armada in these distant parts was such a nine-days' wonder that the entire population of one village followed us along the bank of the river to the next, where they were joined by another group; at the third village the whole crowd of them met us at the landing-stage. After studying us closely for some time one or two of them took me on one side and asked me questions; the thing that seemed to interest them most of all was our parson.

'Is he a real holy man?'

I said of course he was real. They exchanged glances.

'That is, a priest?'

'Yes, of course.'

All this was marvellous in the extreme to these countrymen, living so far away from the railway lines. They wandered round our tents all night, and the more inquisitive lifted the flaps aside and prevented us from getting any sleep.

Next day our ethnographical group set out for the village of Likhoryevo to study the celebration of the 'Nettle Festival', which probably was a relic of the pagan cult of the god Yarila.

I was not at all sure we would see anything worth while; we would probably finish up with taking down a few lines of ancient ritual from the mouth of one of the old women of Likhoryevo. Naturally we didn't go to the village and ask about the god Yarila right away; we were going to have a look at the pottery works.[1] It was only when the hearts of these pottery workers were fully opened to us that we asked about the celebration of

[1] The potteries in this part of Russia, founded by the Stroganov family, were well known throughout Russia. See Bunt, *Russian Art*, p. 163.

the spring fertility rites, and about the pagan god. Then one old potter, already well over sixty, with a smile like that of an old faun, came out of the crowd, and showing his strong white teeth, he said:

'Well, that must refer to me.'

Then the potters forgot all about their work and formed a cheerful ring round the priest of the god Yarila. They all agreed in saying:

'Vlasitch will show you everything.'

Vlasitch himself said:

'Come along. I'll try.'

Soon we heard singing, and hurried out into the street, where the old women and the girls were *clearing the field*.[1] This is fairly well known: the old women approach the girls, singing:

Then the field we cleared and cleared!

—the girls approach in their turn, then both groups, moving slowly down the village street, play out the old drama of getting the clearing ready, from the words of the old song: 'Then the millet we sow, we sow.'

Some of them prepare the seeds, others tread down the clearing, freeing the horses, the farmers chase the horses and capture them, fixing as a ransom a young girl. The young men follow the girls, pulling out their bill-hooks on the way. All this is the general representation of clearing the field, on which later the actual sowing of the seed would take place.

Vlasitch did a good deal of whispering with the old women who were managing the girls; he appeared to agree with their methods and stood waiting for them to finish the clearing.

Somebody in the crowd said, meaning Vlasitch:

'He's our sower.'

Vlasitch himself, hearing this, explained to us that the old women had picked him out some time ago, and now he was the only sower, nobody else except him was allowed to do it. From

[1] In the early days of the Slav settlements in the forest lands of North Russia, the villages were moved from time to time, and the first thing they would have to do would be to clear part of the forest, either by cutting or burning or both, then ploughing with wooden ploughs and sowing the crops. After a year or two of the same crops on the same soil, the fertility would be reduced, and the settlement moved on to another part of the forest, where another clearing was made in the same way.

time to time he would disappear somewhere, and each time he returned he appeared more cheerful than ever. At last he came back with a huge pole, about ten times as big as himself, to one end of which he tied a bundle of nettles.

As the pole was lifted up:

Oaken Yarila
On the high pole,
Stood by the tree

a group of spectators formed a wide ring round the sower; inside the ring the children sat in three groups, forming an equilateral triangle.

One of the old ladies, Marfa Baranova, approached the old man, the sower. The old man and the old lady acted as stage managers; they arranged the children so that there would be more room to walk between them, they gave instructions to the leaders about the complicated movements of the mass of women and girls who formed the ring. At last everything was ready and the first links of the endless chain of women, dressed in their brightest holiday finery, entered the ring. They moved like a snake between the three groups of children, singing as they went. The remainder moved round in spiral rings. At last everybody was following in the steps of the one in front of them, but the children, between whom the women walked, were soon hidden from the spectators, and later it seemed as if they were not moving at all, but waving about like a field of rye, and all facing the high pole with the bunch of nettles tied to the top, and the two old people standing beneath it.

The dancers sang:

On the hills the poppy, under the hills the poppy,
Poppy-poppyheads, handsome girls,
Stand in a row!

—and then inquired:

Are the peas ripe?
Are the beans ripe?
Are the greens ripe?

The choir was silent, waiting an answer from the old man.

No; it appeared that not only were the peas not ripe, but the

ground was not even ploughed yet, and there were no horses; so they had to breed some more stallions; but these weren't ready yet; they had to send for some mare's eggs.

Everybody laughed, and they walked round in a circle again, singing:

On the hills the poppy . . .

Later, when the singers again asked: 'Are the peas ripe?' the old man answered that the young stallions were growing well, but there had been another misfortune; the plough was broken, and they had to ask the blacksmith to forge them a *six-vershok ploughshare*.[1]

After the lapse of more time, there was a fresh disaster; the old man had caught a cold, and there was nobody to do the ploughing.

However, the old man still didn't feel very well, and the peas went on growing, but the young women were still worrying about them, crowding round in a circle and asking:

Are the peas ripe?

They all cheered up when the old man started walking round and fooling about with the old lady, and he did fool about too! And the peas grew very tall.

'Now the beans ought to be good!' cried the sower.

Yes, they were already in ribbons—over there was a ripe pod *six vershoks long*.

Then the whole crowd of women rose and asked for the last time:

Are the peas ripe?
Are the beans ripe?
Are the greens ripe?

With a loud shout 'They are ripe!' the old man waved the pole with the bunch of nettles on it; the women cleared a space for it, and it fell to the ground with a crash; the old man embraced the old lady, and the young men chased the women with the nettles, slapping them against their legs.

The spectators, cheerful and happy, repeated after him:

'They are ripe!'

[1] Six vershoks—about 10½ inches.

When the display was over we all met in Vlasitch's cottage, and sent for Marfa Baranova. Then we wrote down the words of the ceremony, which included many sayings and expressions leaving us in no doubt whatever that we were dealing with Yarila, the god of primitive man. True, it was a pitiful remnant of the cult, but it was powerful enough to arouse the feeling of gratitude to the power which made the earth productive in the service of man, and that is a feeling which nearly all people have lost. We could even see how this was done, for everything was referred to grossly almost by its proper name, but this grossness was essential, like the grossness of the earth itself, producing the finest lacework of flower and herb. . . .

We were quite satisfied and even happy with these poor remnants of the Spring of Man, for we were learned folk, and the learned are always satisfied with relics. . . .

For our return journey it all happened just like the nettle ceremony: the young stallion was in the field, and we had to send for him, get him caught, and brought to us. We were not left alone with Vlasitch and Marfa Baranova for long; a crowd of inquisitive villagers soon gathered, and suddenly some of the women, to whom we had given a small sum of money after the 'nettle ceremony', rushed hurricane-like into the cottage, all shouting at once like a flock of huge birds. We were rather unnerved by this bacchantic display; it appeared quite likely they would throw themselves at us and tear us in bits. One old woman in particular, looking as if she had been carved out of wood and painted, raved at us, and next to her was a yellow and red and very pretty dark-haired woman, obsessed with the whirl of the hurricane. They all had their mouths wide open and their teeth were gleaming. With some difficulty we realized at last they were all shouting in their different ways the same two words: 'Sixty copecks'. Then we saw what the trouble was and gave one of them the sixty copecks; then they all tore out of the cottage and ran down the street, some of them stumbling as they ran.

'Widows and childless wives,' observed Vlasitch.

'Widows,' I said, 'I can understand that, but surely the childless women have their husbands to look after them?'

'But you can't tie a man to a childless woman—a woman without children is a free woman.'

We had clearly seen before us those stubborn pagan women the early Christian fathers had called 'the Godless'.

But that was not so important; there are women of that kind everywhere. What struck us was the attitude of certain quite respectable peasants who were in Vlasitch's cottage at the time. One of them said outright:

'These women are very useful to us; after all somebody has got to give us some fun.'

THE FLOWERING OF THE RYE

It was a calm, beautiful evening. The fields of rye were in full flower; everywhere we could sense a powerful feeling of love, drawn from the growth of living things, born of the earth. We were riding in Vlasitch's cart, and he was telling us all about himself; what a difficult time he had with his first wife; their first child had to be delivered with the aid of a surgeon, so that afterwards they were no longer able to live as man and wife, and he had to bear with this for the rest of his life. True, he did not complain about it, but still, there were no children, and a peasant's life is a poor thing without children. Well, at length his wife died, and he married a younger woman; the children began to arrive, but they were all little; here he was, already over sixty, and beginning to get rather feeble, and the work always growing and growing, and he didn't get much help from his family.

Just then we were passing through a village, and noticed an unusually long and lofty aerial. Vlasitch was very interested in this, and we began to talk to him about radio.

'But have you ever heard about monkey glands?' he asked. 'They give you an injection, and you are five years younger.'

'What?' replied my companion. 'Five years? More like twenty-five.'

'No, no,' said Vlasitch. 'Five years would do for me, the boys

will soon be growing up, and I don't want any more than that, because . . .'

And he asked us quite seriously where he could get the stuff.

However, this village where we noticed the aerial seemed endless; we went on and on, and there was no end to it; it went right over the hill, then through the marshes, and then over another hill—it was clear that the birth-rate in this out-of-the-way district was bounding up. . . .

In the orange light of the last traces of sunset we came to the meeting of the two rivers Nerl and Kubri, and over the bridge the abundant life of Grogorovo and Adrianovo; there were crowds of people along the banks and in the streets, full of vigour and go, and here and there scraps of song, like the mayflies.

On the river was parson Philya, with his big boat, and at least forty children with him, sitting back to back, like Mazaya with the hares;[1] the parson was giving the lads of the village a ride. The Robinsons had the girls with them, also packed tightly like Mazaya with the hares, but all singing to the mandoline and the

[1] The allusion is to the old peasant of Nekrassov's poem, who thus rescued some hares stranded on an island by the spring floods.

balalaika. When they caught sight of us, they all followed the cart along the bank, so we arrived together at our tents on the banks of the Kubri. Thus we had only been away for one day and the expedition had already lost its scientific nature, and when parson Philya appeared, more than half tipsy, and a good deal scared of his learned chief, he had a good dressing-down:

'You soon lose your interest in nature-study, Father.'

SUMMER

THE EVENING BEAUTY

The scent of flowers always takes me back to the very first love of early childhood, before sexual love was possible. There are, of course, some flowers that arouse animal passions, but this is a defect and merely shows the common origin of the animal and vegetable worlds. Is it possible that we even get our feeling of joy from the scent of flowers because of our own defects, because we are incapable of love? Jasmine, for instance, has a particularly depraved scent, and to my mind our common Evening Beauty of the woods conceals within itself a certain animal flavour, especially towards the end when the signs of spring have gone and summer begins. It seems as if it realized this itself and is ashamed to give out its scent when the sun is shining. But I have noticed more than once that when the Evening Beauty loses its first freshness, when the white flower becomes almost yellow, in the last hours of its fading beauty it loses all its shame and it smells even in broad daylight.

I have no regrets when the last anxieties of spring are over; it seems pointless to me to complain about its ending; all I want to do is to cease my agitated journeys to and fro and settle down in a quiet spot, where I can still keep close to nature. I choose for myself a small village in a district suitable for training my dogs, and make it my temporary home. At times I go long distances in search of game, but come back in the evening to the same cottage, to sleep in the same bed, to do more and more writing. The scent of the spring flowers led me from place to place, it turned me into a vagabond. Now I render my muck to the farmer in whose yard I stay, together with his other animals. Very likely in this way people settled down from the beginning, in the necessity to keep their muck, and darken the earth around them.

To-day I went for a short walk with the dog. I picked an Evening Beauty; I could smell it in the sunlight. It was very strong. I said to the dog: 'We've done enough wandering—spring is over.'

THE WHITE RAINBOW

HAVE you ever seen a white rainbow? It sometimes appears in the marshes on a very fine day. For this there has to be a mist rising in the early morning, and the sun seems to shine down through it. Then the mist appears to gather in a dense arch, very white in colour, sometimes with a tinge of rose or cream. I like a white rainbow; to me it is like a young mother with her breasts full of milk. This morning the white rainbow rose with one foot on a wooded slope, arched right across our hill, and came down again to the marshy valley where I intended to train my dog Nerl.

The rye was already getting brown. The meadow flowers this year, owing to the continuous rain, have been unusually bright and showy. Between the damp alder shrubs that drenched me as I walked I soon found a path through the swamp, and some distance ahead, almost buried in the flowers, I saw a simple Berendean, his grey fuzzy beard hanging down over his chest. I stood admiring the valley, over which the curlew were flying, and was unable to move from the spot till the Berendean disappeared in the bushes of the swamp. Then I myself, just as he had done before me, plunged into the mass of flowers (among which I noticed, besides many others, the 'Devil's Mother-in-law'), following his track to the edge of the marshes, to a high spot rather like a dune, covered with small, crooked birch trees. This wide strip at the edge of the bog, running alongside the meadow, seemed an ideal place for nesting snipe and woodcock. I was just making up my mind to climb one of the hillocks when I suddenly heard the call I had been waiting for down in the green valley, a cry like the steady creak of a bucket when you carry it to the water. 'Ka-chu-ka-chu . . .' cried the snipe, gathering its wings together like a fork and diving down into the valley. I carefully noted the spot where the bird had emerged, and I took Nerl towards it on the lead. The grass was very high, but as we drew near the place where the bird had been it became shorter and shorter, and at last, on a little platform covered with yellowing reeds, we came to the spot where I expected to find the bird. I stood the dog against the wind and allowed her to take the scent. At this moment for some reason or other I was turning over in

my mind the saying: 'At this kind of thing man eats dog.'[1] It occurred to me that the adage had been invented by a gamekeeper; when training a stupid dog a man can easily get so angry that he stands there and yells without sense or reason, while the foolish dog rushes off into the swamp after the birds, and that shows the dog eating the man. But it sometimes happens that a dog will not only listen and understand your words, but when you remember something or other as you walk along, and give a deep sigh, the dog at your side will stop and look up and ask you to share your thoughts with him; thus far can a dog become human—and so we say: at this kind of thing man eats dog. My Nerl was still more than half wild, but in bringing her close to the snipe I was hoping that on this day of the white rainbow she would absorb from me the kind and thoughtful fellow that I had always tried to be. I was also hoping that I had not been wrong in my choice of dog; and that she would do the impossible—a dog taking the scent of the snipe for the first time, and making a point. But no; either she had not scented anything, or there was nothing on the flat place by the reeds for her to smell. Wondering where the bird had gone, I remembered the Berendean; perhaps he had scared it off. Then I heard a shout:

'Hi! You with the beard!'

I turned round and saw the Berendean himself, with his fuzzy beard hanging down over his chest, with one hand resting on his scythe, and pointing with the other at something on the hillock overgrown with the stunted birches. Now I began to see what had happened; as he passed the hill the old Berendean had frightened the hen bird. She had left her chicks to look after themselves, and had flown high over the reeds, where I had seen her. But as I approached she began running between the tussocks of grass, tall as skyscrapers to her, though they concealed her completely from me, back to the spot where she had left her young. I had seen all these tricks hundreds of times, and was not deceived; as soon as I stood among the birches again the snipe, with her cry of 'ka-chu-ka-chu', flew out and dived into the long grass as into a pool of water. Down there in the dark and secret corridors of the grassy hillocks the bird ran freely, quite invisible to me, and when she wanted to have a look at us, she

[1] Chilovek na etom dyele sobaku s'yel—saying which may be translated literally as above, meaning 'He is rather a dab at this sort of thing'.

would fly out again, then settle once more and call to her little ones.

Down there between the reed-beds there was a small stretch of water, and through the usual marsh grasses I could see some dark green lines running towards it; these were invisible streams underneath the grass. In the water itself the reeds were much thinner, and the water was banked by open patches of mud, precious in the nocturnal life of the snipe; here they come and push their long beaks in and out and forage for worms with those admirable forceps. In the middle of this stretch of water there was a bed of lilies, the stems of which, twisted into rings, the wildfowler calls 'batishki'; on these 'batishki' the ducks settle in the daytime. Near by we found at once an entire brood, four all told, nearly as big as their mother, but much more sluggish in flight. Taking Nerl on the lead, I put her to the spot where the youngsters had emerged, but although we trampled down a large patch of grass, there was no sign of them. Then I crossed over to the other side of the water, where I had noticed another brood, looked everywhere, but could not find them. Tired out by my long and pointless efforts, I took out a cigarette and lit up, at the same time letting go the lead. As I concentrated all my attention on the end of the cigarette and the burning match, so that the one met the other properly, I was suddenly conscious of something going on outside the field of my attention. I looked up and saw a young snipe fly out like a piece of old rag about ten paces away, while Nerl, in great surprise, watched it from the grass. I failed to realize even then why the snipe should have been found as soon as I had dropped the lead and started to light my cigarette. The thread of my thoughts, corresponding to the real understanding of the dog, had strayed, but then it suddenly dawned on me . . .

. . . At the present moment I am not in the marshes, but working out and writing down what I venture to call my creative thought. And it is creative if it only results in the addition of one more sporting dog to our common store of wealth. I watched the old Berendean out there cutting the grass while I was working with the dog, when he took a moment's rest, watching me every now and again. I appreciated his work; he also was creating something; his material was grass. But what about Nerl? She

was also a creator; her material was the snipe. And they too had their work—their worms, and thus without end in the world of living things the death of one was from another point of view an act of creation on the part of another. Over there I could hear the whistle of the floating dredger, that marvellous machine, lifting up the bed of the river, and gradually approaching our swamp, removing the water and drying it up, and making my artistic work in these parts needless and absurd.

I was tired, and the whistle of the machine was preparing to put an end to my enthusiasm as a creator, absorbed and happy in his material, preparing to transform it into the painful necessity, sooner or later, of becoming myself the material of somebody else's creative efforts. And the man up to his knees in water cutting hay for the winter feed of his solitary cow seemed to be laughing at my useless labour. . . .

And suddenly . . . that was just the point, there was really nothing sudden about it at all. It simply happened because I wanted a smoke and let Nerl go free. For many years the ancestors of my pedigree Nerl had been in the hands of men who had modified the natural urge of the dog to steal quietly up to her prey, and then stand perfectly still for a while, in order to spring at it suddenly and seize it: the dog is allowed to stand—that is her point—but man has taken the leap to himself, with his shot—much more certain to reach the target than the dog's leap. For many years this training had entered into the sporting dog's blood, this habit of standing at the game she had found, while the business of training was simply a matter of finding ways to remind her of it. But I didn't remind my Nerl; I merely confused her by tugging at the lead. But as soon as I let it go she found herself free and flushed the young snipe at once. The result of feeling free, an essential condition of the dog's creative work, was the link in the chain that I had overlooked. Now I can reconstruct the whole process. When she caught the scent of the young snipe she didn't find all her inherited traits at once; she was scared and startled. She lifted her head well out of the grass to follow the bird's flight, and the breeze brought her some new scent from another direction, her nostrils quivered for a moment, she looked at me and then remembered something . . . Just like my boys playing at blind man's buff, with their eyes bandaged—

so she advanced slowly and cautiously towards the wood. On the mud there were a large number of footprints left by the birds the night before. I should have been quite happy if her keen senses had led her only to these. It would have been quite sufficient if she had stood there with uplifted paw and had frozen in her tracks. But besides doing all this, she turned her head and said with her eyes:

'This is a very serious matter. I've never come across anything like this before. Come over and help, only don't hurry and don't splash about—I don't seem to be able to go any further myself. . . .'

When I eventually reached her side she was trembling, and seemed almost ashamed of making such an exhibition of herself:

'What makes me act like this?'

I stroked her and looked round with my sportsman's eye and saw something she would never have noticed: about ten paces away, under the thick dark grass, a runnel of water flowed into the creek, and between its two channels there was an island, rye-brown in colour, circular, and no larger than the seat of a Viennese chair. On the island my attention was suddenly attracted by two golden lines, approaching one another in a curve like the neck of a bottle, and over them a long beak, all clearly revealed against the background of the water—this was a little jack-snipe, only distinguishable from the rust-coloured surroundings resembling its plumage by these two golden lines and the long beak.

But Nerl was still making her point. You can imagine how pleased I was! I looked round at the old Berendean cutting his hay. Leaning on his scythe, this other creative worker was watching me attentively. I pointed out the dog to him, as if to say:

'Look! I haven't been working all the morning for nothing. Look, she's making a point!'

The Berendean threw his scythe down and waved his arms, as if to reply:

'Wonderful! Wonderful! That dog must be worth something!'

Again I heard the whistle of the dredger, but what did it matter to me now if they did dry up the swamp? That morning

I had penetrated into the secret of all creation. Let them go on drying up the marshes. I would create elsewhere in Nature places where I would find good sport, and discover birds with long beaks and handsome dark eyes.

THE SCHOOL IN THE BUSHES

A YOUNG setter must be taught to move round his master in the open in a circle no wider than the range of gunshot, say about fifty paces, and in the woods even closer than this; and the most important thing is that he must always keep his master in mind and not be attracted by his own business. All this part of the training—moving in a proper circle in the field and not losing sight of his master in the woods—is called good tracking.

I went up to the hill covered with small bushes, taking Romka with me. This plantation had been allotted to the people of the village for firewood; for this reason it was known as the 'allotment'. It had been divided, of course, into strips, and each man took what he required from his own strip. One peasant wouldn't cut anything at all, and his section stood out like an island. Another would only cut the big timber, leaving the smaller stuff to grow. A third would cut everything perfectly clean, so that all that would be left on his strip would be heaps of rotting twigs and branches. That was why all this raised ground looked like a head of hair cut by a blind barber.

It was not to be expected that in such a spot near the town we should find much game, but for the first stages in training a young dog that was all the better. On the bare patches the dog would learn at least one thing: to run properly without forgetting his master.

I unfastened the lead and stroked Romka. He didn't realize I had set him free, and stood by my side as if we were tied together. Waving my hand, I said to him:

'Fetch!'

He understood and tore away. In no time he had disappeared into the bushes, but losing sight of me, he was scared and came back. For a second or two he stood perfectly still and looked at me in a peculiar manner—almost as if he were taking my photograph, so that he could carry my likeness with him into the bushes and among the tree stumps, which had such a different shape from human beings. When he had completed this personal obligation, he showed me his ever-waving tail and ran off again.

We were in the woods, not in the field where the dog can be watched the whole time. In the woods you have to teach him to make a wide circle from left to right, turning like a top. If, after disappearing on the left, the dog doesn't show up on the right, after making his circle, this means he has scented game somewhere, and has stopped. It is good practice to train a dog in a clearing, for every now and again he has to cross the path, where he can be observed.

However, my Romka had disappeared into the thicket and had not returned. I was glad his sense of freedom was stronger at first than his attachment to his master. I didn't mind a bit; I am a sportsman myself, and like my freedom. All I had to do was to use his freedom with my consent, making it worth while for both of us. I ran through the bushes, taking long strides, so as not to leave my tracks close enough together for him to find me too easily. I was making for the adjoining strip, in the middle of which stood a large clump of junipers. I worked up speed and took a long leap into the middle of the clump and concealed myself.

The tapping of the dog's feet could not be heard on the wet grass, but I could hear in the distance the rustle of the bushes and a good deal of puffing. I understood this puffing; he had lost sight of me and was running round as fast as his legs could carry

him; in his excitement he was breathing hard. However, he had judged my hiding-place fairly well; he had left the first strip where I had started my long leaps.

When all was quiet I gave a signal with a sharp whistle. It was like playing at blind man's buff.

My whistle probably reached him as he stood in the clearing, listening hard. He judged where the sound came from exactly, and ran full tilt into the strip with the junipers, puffing like a steam engine. I froze in the bushes.

Owing to his hard running and his terrific excitement his tongue was hanging out of the side of his mouth. In that state he would never be able to scent anything, he was clearly depending entirely on hearing. His ears were half-and-half; one stood straight up, while the other hung down over his cheeks. He tried bending his head over to one side—no good—then to the other—no good either, can't hear a thing. Then it dawned on him what the trouble was; he couldn't hear his master's whistle because it was masked by his own breathing. He closed his mouth; in his haste his upper lip curled over, and then he listened intently, with one lip thrust out over the other.

So as not to burst out laughing at the funny face he was making, with that lip thrust out, I had to put my hand over my mouth. But he still didn't hear me.

At this moment the woods without his master seemed an empty desert to him, where only the wolves, his forebears, were prowling. They would never forgive him for betraying them for the sake of his love for man, his warm corner, and his bread and salt. They would tear him to pieces and eat him. When you live with the wolves, you must howl like a wolf.

And he tried it. He lifted up his head and howled.

I had never heard him make a sound like this before. He was actually sensing the wolfish desert without the presence of man. He was howling just as the young wolves howled when their mother went out after her prey and never came back. . . .

For that was what happened. She had taken a sheep and was bringing it back to her family. But a hunter followed her tracks and lay in wait for her. The old wolf was killed. But one of the men took the young ones home with him and fed them. Nature's resources of tenderness are inexhaustible; the young wolves transferred their feelings for their mother to the man who had

adopted them, licked his hands, jumped up and put their paws on his chest. They never knew that this same man had killed their mother. But the wild wolves know; they are man's deadly enemies, and since this ancient betrayal, the enemies of the dogs as well.

Romka howled so mournfully that it went straight to my heart. But I had no pity for him. I was the teacher.

I held my breath. He turned his back to me and listened in another direction. Perhaps he had heard a woodcock calling somewhere in the heavens! had his master gone up there and was he calling him from the sky! A cow in a near-by field flushed a peewit, and flying out, he whistled his usual: 'Chi-vi?'[1] This wasn't so high, nor so far away; perhaps that was his master! Romka tore after this 'Chi-vi?', but I whistled sharply:

'Here I am '

He came running back.

I had been torturing him like this for something like twenty minutes, giving him for the rest of his life a terror of the woods, and of his ancestors, the wolves. When at last I stirred in the bushes and he heard me, and I lit my pipe, letting him catch the smell of the tobacco, he realised his ears had been letting him down, and his head became as smooth and round as a melon. I stood up. He lay on the ground asking for forgiveness. I came out of the clump of bushes, stroked him, and he threw himself at me in his joy, running round and barking happily.

YARIK

For some time I had been without a setter of my own, and had been reduced to hunting 'by traces', that is, I found the tracks of a bird in the grass early in the morning when there was a heavy dew on the ground, and followed them like a dog. I cannot be absolutely certain, but at times I seemed to go to some degree by scent as well.

About this time a vet. living about thirty versts away succeeded in mating his handsome Irish setter bitch with a friend's dog of the same breed; both these animals had come from a large

[1] Lit. 'Who (or rather who's) are you?' A common form of address to strangers.

estate in the neighbourhood which had been confiscated. So that just when I was almost at the end of my tether my friend presented me with a six-weeks-old Irish setter pup. Naturally I didn't say no but I gave him something in exchange. Sometimes training a dog without a gun gives me just as much pleasure as actual shooting. I remember once . . . In the clearing round the old black tree stumps there were a lot of red flowers, as tall as pine saplings; this made the whole clearing look red, although there were even more Ivan-and-Maryas there, half blue and half yellow, and many white daisies, with their yellow buttons in the centre, and bluebells, lilac cuckoo-frocks—all the flowers you could think of—but the red flowers like young pine trees made the whole clearing look a mass of red. And by the old black tree stumps you could still find wild strawberries, ripe and very sweet. The light summer shower was nothing to complain about; I was sitting it out under one of the pines; the gnats collected here out of the rain, and no matter how much smoke I blew at them from my pipe, they were worrying my dog Yarik to death. It came to the point of lighting a 'chest', as we call a camp-fire in these parts; the smoke from the pine chips was very thick, and soon we had mastered the gnats and driven them out into the rain. But the very moment we achieved this, the rain stopped. A summer shower is never much more than a diversion.

However, we still had to sit under the tree for half an hour longer and wait for the birds to come out and start feeding, showing us their fresh tracks on the grass. When I judged this time had elapsed, I came out into the red clearing and let Yarik free.

'Fetch, my friend!' I said.

Yarik was at this stage in the third division. He was taking the full course of training for Irish setters, under my direction, and the third division was the final stage. If all went well, at the end of the summer I would possess the finest sporting dog in the whole world, an Irish setter of my own training, tireless in the chase and with an extraordinary range of scent.

I often used to look at my Yarik's nose enviously and think to myself: 'If I had an apparatus like that I would run like the wind up and down the clearing among the red flowers, and seek out all the most delightful smells I could find.'

But we are not very sensitive in this way, and so we lose a

great deal of pleasure. We are continually asking: 'How are your eyes? Is your hearing still good?' But nobody ever seems to inquire: 'How's your sense of smell? How are you off for a nose?' I have been training dogs now for many years. Every time the animal scents the game and leads me towards it I am excited and happy and often think: 'What if, instead of Yarik, I had winded the game?'

'Fetch, citizen!' I repeated.

And he makes a circuit of the red clearing.

Soon Yarik stops on the edge of the clearing under the trees, sniffing attentively at a certain spot, turns round to me very seriously and calls me over to investigate. We understand one another quite well without words. He led me to the spot very slowly, crouching a little and looking very much like a young fox.

In this manner we approached a thick brake, which only Yarik himself could enter, but I was not going to let him go in alone; by himself he would probably go for the birds and seize them, wet from the rain, and thus undo in a second all my work of instruction. I was just going to call him off with a feeling of regret when suddenly he waved his splendid, wing-like tail and glanced at me. I understood; he was saying:

'They spend the night in here, but feed in the clearing among the red flowers.'

'Is that so?' I replied.

He sniffed at the flowers, but there was no trace of them just there. Then we realized how it was; the shower had obliterated the scent outside, but the trail we were following had survived because it lay under the trees.

It remained for us to make a new circuit through the clearing and find new scent after the shower. But Yarik did not complete his semicircle, but stood motionless by the side of a small but very thick clump of bushes. The scent of the game had come to him so powerfully on the run that he had stopped in a very peculiar attitude: his body twisted almost to a circle; if he had liked, he could have admired his own splendid tail in comfort. I went up to him, stroked him, and said:

'Go on, if you can!'

He straightened himself out and tried to move forward. This seemed possible, only it had to be done very cautiously. After

walking all round the bushes in this manner, he gave me to understand:

'They were in here during the shower!'

Then he followed the fresh tracks in the dew, the 'traces' of green that could be detected with the naked eye on the grass grey with the raindrops, lowering his long feathery tail almost to the ground.

Probably they had heard us and were also moving forward slowly through the bushes, and Yarik realized this, and explained in his own fashion:

'They are just in front, and very near.'

Then they entered a large patch of juniper, and here Yarik made his final point. Up to now he had been able to open his mouth and gasp from time to time, but now he closed his jaws firmly, only the narrow tip of his pink tongue, not being able to get back in time, stuck out of his mouth like the petal of a rose. A gnat settled there and bit him, and I could see how the dark-brown, oilcloth-like button at the end of his nose felt the pain and danced with the scent, but it was impossible to pull his tongue back now, he might gasp and frighten the birds away.

Not being so excited as Yarik, I went up to him cautiously and chased the gnat away with a light rap on his nose, and stood there for a time admiring him from the side; he was standing there like a statue with his wing of a tail stretched out in line with his back, and his whole being concentrated into two sharp points in his eyes.

I moved round the clump of bushes silently till I stood opposite him, so that the birds would be unable to escape without being seen, but would have to fly straight up. We stood there for some time, and it was clear that down there in the bushes they knew quite well they were surrounded. I approached the bush and heard the voice of the hen blackcock; she gave a short 'kvokh', and that meant to the youngsters:

'I'm going out to have a look, but you stay here in the meantime.'

And with a terrific swish she flew out.

If she had flown at me, Yarik would not have stirred; even if she had gone straight for him, he would have remembered that the real prey was still in the bushes, and that it was a terrible crime to chase a flying bird. But the huge grey hen, almost as

large as a domestic fowl, turned a somersault in mid-air and flew down almost to his nose, then she fluttered along the ground, taunting him with her cry:

'Catch me! Catch me, I can't fly!'

Then she dropped to the earth as if she had been shot, about ten paces away, and ran along through the red flowers. It was too much for Yarik, and forgetting the years of my instruction, he went after her. . . .

The trick had succeeded; she had decoyed the marauder from her brood, and crying to her young from the bushes: 'Fly out all of you in different directions!' she shot up into the trees and was lost. The youngsters flew up and out of the junipers in every direction, and it seemed as if they were crying to Yarik in the distance:

'Fool! Fool!'

'Come back!' I shouted to the one who had been fooled. He pulled himself together, and came back slowly. In a pointed, pitying voice I asked:

'What have you done?'

He sank to the ground.

'Now then! Come on, come on!'

He jumped up and laid his head on my knee, asking most humbly to be forgiven.

'All right,' I said, sitting down in the juniper clump. 'Come up here behind me and sit still, and don't puff; let's see if we can't make fools of them in a minute.'

About ten minutes later I whistled softly, like a young grouse:

'Fyoo, fyoo!'

That meant:

'Where are you, mama?'

'Kvokh, kvokh!' she replied, meaning:

'I'm coming!'

Then we heard the same soft whistle from other directions:

'Where are you, mama?'

'I'm coming, I'm coming!' she answered them all.

One of the youngsters whistled quite close to me. I replied, and he ran up, and there was the grass waving right under my knee. Looking Yarik straight in the eye, and threatening him with my fist, I swiftly covered the spot with the palm of my hand and pulled out a grey chick about the size of a pigeon.

'There you are,' I said quietly. 'Smell it!'

He turned his head away; he was afraid of opening his mouth and starting to puff.

'No, brother, no!' I urged, in a pitying voice. 'Smell it!'

A terrible punishment.

Now I started to whistle again, and I heard the mother slowly approach; she had gathered them all together, except for the one in my hand, and now they were coming for that last one. There were seven others; each one, as it had found its mother, had become silent, and when all seven were quiet, I, acting as the eighth, asked softly:

'Where are you, mama?'

'You come to us!' she replied.

'Fyoo, fyoo; no, no; you bring them all to me!'

She came running through the grass towards us, and every now and again her head and neck appeared like the neck of a bottle, and the long grass behind her waved with her seven chicks.

They all settled down about two feet off, and then I looked at Yarik as much as to say:

'Now, don't play the fool this time!'

Then I let my young grouse free. He fluttered round the clump of bushes, with all the others fluttering after him. Yarik and I watched them fly away, and laughed between ourselves:

'Now we've made fools of you, citizens!'

TRUSTY

I had succeeded in training Yarik very well for work in the marshes, but being passionately fond of shooting in the woods, I could not resist the temptation of taking him with me after blackcock. That was where I made a big mistake. I should have waited a little longer and given him a special course of work for that. On the first day, however, he did very well, almost as well as in the marshes, only I had to do rather too much whistling. But when we were coming back in the evening a hen with a late brood crossed our path and started to abuse Yarik in the usual manner. He went after her, and on his way

stumbled on one of the chicks, and then lost his head completely, following it for some distance. I shouted at him so angrily that he jumped away from me at once and ran off, with me in pursuit, but eventually I lost him and he stayed out all night. In the morning we saw his ginger ears in the potato patch.

Those of you who have ever trained a dog will understand my feelings; I should only have been able to correct him after a good deal of hard work, and it would be hopeless to think of taking him out again that season. There was only one way out—finding another dog, and then training Yarik again right from the beginning, so that he would gradually forget the incident. So I began to look out for another dog—any kind of dog would do, it would at least be something to shoot over.

I made inquiries everywhere, and sent the boys out to check up on the reports that came in. One day they came back and told me they had been passing a large farm, with many beehives in the orchard, and they had sat on the fence to have a rest. By and by an old man came out of the house with an axe in his hand, and started chopping firewood. After cutting a nice pile the old man whistled, and a dog appeared: black, with tawny under parts, very shaggy coat, and clearly a pedigree animal. Running up to the old man, the dog took a lump of firewood in his teeth and carried it indoors, then came back and took another; while the old man was having a rest he carried the whole pile indoors. The old man then closed the house door and opened the door of the barn, chopped some more wood, and the dog duly carried this into the barn. The boys had run home without waiting to see the end of it, but they could tell from the amount of chips lying around the yard that the old man must have been doing this day after day, getting firewood ready for the winter, or perhaps even for sale, with the dog acting as his assistant.

'Are you sure it was a black dog with fawn underparts, and a very thick coat?' I asked.

'Quite sure,' said the boys, 'though his forehead was rounder than our Yarik's, and he had a broken nose; but he was so shaggy he looked like prehistoric man.'

Next day I went over to the farm to try my luck.

The picture was just as the boys had painted it; the old man chopping firewood, and a fine Gordon setter carrying it into the barn. On one trip the dog didn't quite get to the barn with his

load, but dropped it outside, and came back. The old man picked up a whip. The Gordon saw the whip and ran up to the old man and lay on his back right at his feet. The old man gave him two heavy strokes and threw the whip aside. The Gordon picked up the whip and brought it back to his master, then went back to the wood he had dropped, carried it into the barn, and went happily on with the work.

The dog had a most unusual head, rather like a wig of Louis XIV's time, but his hind parts were stiff and wooden, either from the heavy beatings he had suffered, or from distemper. I had heard one or two things about the way he had been beaten; it was more than likely that this was the cause of it.

'What's the idea of putting a gun dog to this kind of work?' I asked the old peasant.

'He's no gun dog,' growled the old man. 'Why, I can't even train him to stack the wood properly, he throws it down anyhow, and I can't make him put it right.'

The old man's son must have heard us talking, and he came out to see who was there. I told them all about my trouble with Yarik, and said I would have no objection in buying Trusty—as the dog was called—if he showed the slightest signs of being any good. They told me they had bought him during the time of the famine, from a man named Bendrishyov, largely because they took pity on the poor animal, and he had been given a good character by his owner. I knew Bendrishyov well, he was one of our finest wildfowlers, an excellent shot, and a very clever dog-trainer. It occurred to me that these peasants had no idea at all how a dog like this should be handled; that was clear from the way they tortured him by this carrying of firewood; and I realized I ought to take the chance of buying poor Trusty from them before they realized what they were doing. I asked the price, and they suggested twenty roubles—it was a bargain. But you must never let a peasant think his price is too low, so I started to haggle with them. They put the samovar on, and we drank tea together. I had several glasses of tea sweetened with honey, and went on with the haggling, though I would have been prepared to offer them thirty or more willingly, instead of the twenty roubles they were asking. My hosts also drank plenty of cups of tea, and worked themselves into a sweat over their bargaining, though, like a pair of fools, they praised

Bendrishyov rather than the dog, and kept repeating what I knew as well as they did, that Bendrishyov knew his dog-trainer's business better than Father Igor his Lord's Prayer. Finally I struck a bargain for the dog and fifteen pounds of honey, and with the dog and the honey and a whistle they had thrown in as an extra, I made off home as fast as I could go.

For two or three days I confined myself to making friends with Trusty. I didn't attempt to do any shooting with him, and he became so attached to me that I only had to walk out of one room into another for him to whine and whimper. He was a very good-natured, willing creature, with a confiding, orphan-like character. After three days of this treatment I was confident he would never leave me, so I took the boys and we set out for the woods. Yarik had been quite satisfactory in the marshes, so we took Trusty into the woods on a lead. I released him in the first clearing where we were likely to come across a brace of black-cock. He immediately began to forage into the bushes, then came back as if he had forgotten something and stood opposite us on the far side of the clearing, watching us steadily and cocking his shaggy head from one side to another. After observing this obviously very necessary preliminary, he disappeared again, returned, and vanished again, just as a properly trained sporting dog should do in the woods. Shortly afterwards, coming to a spot where the clearing led down to the swamp, and divided from it by a thick patch of undergrowth, Trusty sobered down and began to move forward very cautiously. He showed none of Yarik's excitement, none of that concentration of the dog on his own doggy business, completely forgetting his master behind him. No, he worked very carefully, as if he were hunting for us, and not for himself. He was perhaps too long over it; the birds had clearly moved away, and at length he realized this himself, stopped, looked first one way and then the other, and without any signs of haste made a short circuit and thus cut off the escape of the birds, who were trapped in the depths of an isolated bush. Then he made his point in a very matter-of-fact manner, standing perfectly still with no signs of excitement. We arranged ourselves in a line; I stood in the middle with the boys on either side. So we stood for a time, till I decided to give the order: 'Forward!' Trusty took one pace forward, then another—one

bird flew out—a shot; then a second bird—another shot. We bagged all three of them, and they fell in the marsh, overgrown with reeds taller than a man. Trusty asked permission, after the echo of the shots had died away, and went in himself and brought them out one after another.

There was plenty of game in this part of the woods. In a few days we shot enough to cover the cost of the dog many times over, and as sometimes happens when you are overjoyed with your good fortune, I wrote to Trusty's former masters to tell them how satisfied I was and that I hardly knew how to thank them enough; I agreed with them completely that Bendrishyov knew his business better than Father Igor his Lord's Prayer. Later I heard indirectly that this letter had offended them very much; they expected that the dog would be a failure and that Bendrishyov had cheated them.

From the very first day of Trusty's appearance the character of Yarik changed completely, although he was too proud to show that the society of the newcomer was uncongenial to him. Even when I took the gun and Trusty began leaping all round me Yarik would lie as still as a grindstone, and gave no indication that he would like to join us. Yet he was clearly very discontented, and I only had to call him once and he was up and away as fast as his legs could carry him, even pushing Trusty to one side in his haste. Up to this time he had always been very slovenly in his habits; he would gnaw at the easy parts of his bone for a while, but when he came to the tougher portions he would throw it on one side and leave it anywhere. Now, however, he was afraid Trusty would pick up his leavings, so he would lie down by the side of his cast-off bone and snarl if the other dog came anywhere near him. If he were called, he would come out with the bone in his mouth, or if he had to go outside for any reason, he took his bone with him, did whatever he wanted to do, and returned with it still in his mouth. I noticed with some alarm that as the days went on he sought every excuse to pick a quarrel with Trusty; I was very much afraid of this, for I knew from old experience the character of these good-natured, orphan-like dogs; they would stand a good deal without complaint, but once they did start, it would be a fight to a finish.

One day they were doing the washing out of doors, and the tub of washing blue stood in one corner of the yard. Yarik was

nibbling his bone not far from the tub itself, and when he found he couldn't get much further with it, he hid it under the tub so that Trusty couldn't find it. A few minutes later I shouted for Trusty to come out into the woods with me. This invitation cut Yarik to the quick, but he kept it to himself, deciding to work out his spite on Trusty. Yet he, the clever, sensible Yarik, knew perfectly well that when it came to a call to go out into the woods, bones were neither here nor there. However, when Trusty ran out, he passed close to the spot where the bone lay concealed under the tub, and this gave Yarik just the chance he had been waiting for; he could go for him without being suspected of jealousy, simply because of the bone. He did it so quickly and skilfully that Trusty, never very sure on his stiff hind legs, fell backwards slap into the tub of blue, feet upwards, like a wooden horse. I could see Trusty's point of view: after his long experience of the drudgery of carrying firewood, and being beaten time after time for no reason at all by the old peasant, there was nothing particularly disgraceful in being tipped feet upwards into a tub of washing blue, and showing himself to his master in such a mess; in any case, he hadn't been hurt at all; but it was no fault of his, he hadn't been going for the bone; what was this ginger upstart attacking him like that for?—it was time to put a stop to it once and for all. Jumping out of the tub, and being several times stronger and bigger than Yarik, he went straight for him.

Usually, when the strength of the two parties to a fight is unequal, the weaker one will lie on the ground and turn his legs up, while the stronger of the two stands over him, snarling, but without using his teeth. After holding the loser in this position for the regulation length of time, the winner will leave him there and go over to a post or a tree close at hand and leave a note, to the effect that he was confident that some way could be found of agreeing in the future. The loser, after sniffing the note, leaves one of his own at the same spot, probably just a matter of appending a formal signature. On occasion I have noticed that the loser attempts to add a condition to the agreement, but when this occurs, the winner makes a fresh note, which is ratified finally by the loser.

But it was very improbable that a proud fellow like Yarik would allow himself to be caught like this and turned belly

upwards—on the contrary, he hurled himself into the scrap, and at first met with some success.

Forgetting what I was doing in my anxiety for Yarik, I rushed to the tub and poured the rest of the blue over the two angry dogs, but that didn't seem to help much. Then I caught Trusty by the tail, and putting my boot on Yarik's chest, tried to pull the black away, but this simply meant that the red-haired one attacked more furiously than ever. Then I tried pulling Yarik away by the tail—this was worse still. Trusty drove his teeth into Yarik, and if it had been the least bit nearer the throat, it would have been the end of Yarik. Fortunately my two boys came up just in the nick of time and pulled them apart by their tails.

Trusty was not the dog to remember insults for long, but from now on Yarik was his declared enemy, and life in our yard became impossible. We had to keep them separated, and it was a confounded nuisance having to keep worrying about them all the time.

One day in September, when I could be fairly certain that no hen grouse with broods of chicks were about, I went out with Yarik into the woods for a trial. It was very successful indeed; Yarik worked beautifully. Either because I was overjoyed with the success of the experiment, or simply because it was warm and I was tired, when we got back I forgot all about Trusty and left the two dogs in the yard together.

During dinner we heard a terrific snarling just under the window, and looking out, we saw both dogs circling round one another with hackles raised.

The slightest movement or sound on our part would have started a fight, so we sat there holding our breath, hoping against hope that it would pass off somehow; relying on the fact that Yarik must have been in a good frame of mind after the day's outing, and that Trusty, after all, was a pretty good-natured dog as a rule.

With his hair standing on end, Yarik went straight up to Trusty, who was waiting silently, but threateningly, for the first false move. Yarik made a slow circuit round the other dog, then went over to the wall and left his first mark—possibly an invitation to sign an armistice. Trusty went up behind Yarik very cautiously, and while he was writing his invitation, sniffed at the

root of his tail. Then, after noting what had been written on the wall, he added his observations in a similar manner, while Yarik, in his turn, sniffed at the base of his tail. Yarik having agreed, he affixed his signature, and Trusty after him, making a slow semi-circle round Yarik, signed the document for the last time—to all appearance the ratification of the treaty of peace.

From that time forward both in the yard and on our shooting trips there was a strict division of duties: Trusty in the woods and plantations, after blackcock, white partridge, and the fat autumn woodcock; and Yarik in the marshes, after common and double snipe, and in the open fields after grey partridge, for in the woods I was only happy with him in the clearings and thin undergrowth.

KATE

KATE's parents were both prize-winning dogs, well known to all connoisseurs. She was a modern breed, the Continental setter. Her coat was parti-coloured: two saddle-like patches on the back, and the remainder white, with a scattering of something very much like coffee grains.

It was I who had changed her name to Kate; her former owners had called her Kitty. A young married couple of the intelligentsia, for the first two years they were childless, and Kitty took the place of a baby. For two whole years she had done little else but loll about on their sofa in Moscow. A few more months of this, and a sporting dog of handsome breed would have degenerated into a useless, spoilt darling. But towards the end of the second year the young wife found it rather tiresome to have to climb up and down five flights of stairs every time she took the dog out, while the husband was away at the office all day. About this time I had a misfortune with Trusty; he had been bitten by another dog suffering from rabies; but I shall not try to describe now what I had to go through before parting with him, the memory is still too painful. Hearing about the setter, and being still very dissatisfied with my too hot-headed Yarik, I decided to try my hand at the dog. I went to see the young people, and they let me have her at a very fair price, begging me with tears in their eyes not to thrash her.

I had heard from experienced trainers that there was no real harm in a dog being two years old, as far as training is concerned, as long as she had not been handled badly before. But Kate was so unspoilt that she took no notice even of small birds; at first she only chased flowers, and during our first walks she seemed very fond of biting the heads of clover and throwing them in the air. She had all the good qualities of the breed—the extraordinary good manners and intelligence—and better still, she was a female; the bitches are always more sensible than the dogs. As far as house-training is concerned, I got over all that with her in little more than a day. I would put some white bread on the floor and when the dog went up to it I shouted 'Wait!' and treated her to a tap on the muzzle.

'Remember,' I said, 'you're not lying on your sofa in Moscow now, my girl.'

In a quarter of an hour I not only taught her to take no food without permission, but to touch nothing lying under her very nose.

Then I taught her to go back and forth, relying entirely on tones of voice; getting her used to the different orders: fetch; here; steady, and to heel. The next day I took her out into a thick hazel plantation, where we were unlikely to come across any game; I hid in the bushes, she found me, and so on; so that on one day we went through the whole of the short course of tracking in the woods. In the field, of course, it didn't succeed all at once; I would go forward like a yacht tacking to windward, and with a wave of my arm or a light whistling make her do the same. For three days we worked hard at this, and at last all was ready for hunting real game.

I took Kate into the marshes for training, since the woodcock and snipe as yet would not have left the undergrowth for the open; all we should find there would be young lapwings. The sporting textbooks are entirely wrong when they say that lapwing is poor material for training a dog; I know of nothing better. It is quite true that the full-grown lapwing is likely to excite a hot-headed young animal, but it is easy to scare them off with a few shots, while the youngsters lie close like little ginger cakes, so tightly that you often put them up with your feet.

At first Kate didn't notice the little cakes, I had to find them myself, by shuffling my feet in the grass; the little cakes turned

into lapwings, and not being able to fly, they would waddle off between the hummocks. Keeping the dog still with the order 'Down!' I allowed her to follow the bird with her eyes, till it settled down again behind the grass.

'Steady! Forward!'

Kate moved forward, crouching low. She didn't make a point at all, just sniffed, and again started forward. I turned her head the other way, so that she couldn't see where the young lapwing settled, made a note of it myself, then set her to find it again by tacking to windward.

She wouldn't take the scent, but seemed to work by her other senses, weaving in and out like a sewing-machine, till she found her object. Again there was no point, again she put the bird up with her muzzle. I went over this a hundred times, but nothing came of it; taking the scent from the air and making a proper point the dog just could not manage. I emerged from the marshes with the idea that quite possibly the two years of living in the Moscow flat had blunted the dog's natural sense of smell.

The Lyakhov marshes, where we made the experiment with the lapwings, were eight versts away from where I was living at the time. It was impossible for me to go all that distance very often, just to see whether the snipe had come into the open yet. But not far away, on the side of the lake, I found a marshy piece of ground, about five acres in extent, and here Kate flushed two full-grown snipe. Then I started to train her on these two older birds. Yet even here this daily work took two hours of my precious time, and I always had to change completely when we arrived home again, for we had to cross some very sticky patches on our way. Besides, very annoying it was, always to return with precisely the same result: Kate, pottering about in the mud, merely scared the birds without doing herself or me any good at all.

One day I took the gun with me and shot one of the snipe. It dropped in the thicket. Kate searched for it, but in exactly the same way as she did for the young lapwings: circling round and round till she stumbled on it under her very nose. However, it did some good, I thought, by getting her accustomed to the bird's scent, so that next day I was counting on something fresh turning up.

The agony of creation, I thought, is not confined to poets;

there is no less torture in training dogs. That night a bright idea came into my head, giving me a fresh line to start on in my researches. I remembered a controversy which had been carried on in the pages of the *Sportsman* concerning the habits of the snipe; some writers affirmed that the male, after mating, took no further part in family life; others, on the other hand, said the cock is often found near the nest. Then I thought of our two birds; one was a cock, and the other a hen, and the nest couldn't be far away. In the morning I set off for the marsh with some excitement. Kate pottered about once more and the bird flew out, each time from more or less the same spot. I made a note of the place, and when I parted the marsh grasses I found four eggs on the hummock, looking remarkably big compared with the body of the snipe itself.

So far so good. I could now train the dog every day to make a point; I could bring her up to the nest on the lead, develop her sense of smell gradually, then lead her up to the young birds, search them out, hide them again. . . .

It was quite exciting to enter the swamp the following day, but I never expected what actually did happen. Altogether it would be about two hundred paces from the entrance of the swamp to the nest itself, so that when Kate emerged from the bushes, at the most about fifty paces, she would have about a hundred and fifty paces in which to make her point, then lead forward slowly to the next, closer and closer; and how she moved! Tyap, tyap, with her thin legs, like a ballerina. I was wearing heavy riding boots; they had been made for me by that out-of-work parson, and made so well that I had to wrap a houseful of old rags round my feet to make them fit. As the dog moved forward all that could be heard would be like a drop of rain falling in the water. I crashed along like a mammoth. Because of the noise I was making she stopped, looked at me in a peculiarly severe manner, and all but said:

'Quieter, please, master!'

After about fifty paces she stopped completely. I looked hard at her, encouraging her to go on just a little further, but no, she wouldn't move. When I pulled one of the parson's boots out of the mud—out flew the bird.

Kate looked startled, and seemed to say:

'Oh dear, what's happened?'

She still didn't move. I allowed her to go forward and sniff cautiously at the nest.

I was quite satisfied with this, but when we came out of the marshes I noticed they had already started to cut the hay, and I was told that all this part would be cut by to-morrow evening. It was out of the question to ask the peasants not to touch the nest; there were a number of them about, and one of them would certainly pick it out and destroy it on purpose, if I asked them not to. I went back into the marsh and cut some willow twigs, sticking them round the nest like a bush. The only thing I was afraid of was that the birds would take fright at the twigs, and leave the nest. No, the next day Kate worked through the section where the grass had been cut, stopped about five paces away from the artificial shrub, and the bird flew out.

About this time, but of course in other parts of the woods, the artist Boris Ivanovitch and a doctor friend of his were also training their dogs. Boris Ivanovitch had a French pointer, while Mikhail Ivanovitch possessed an Irish bitch. I invited them both over, ostensibly for a glass of tea and a chat, but later I led them out into the marsh and showed them . . .

In a word, I was blowing my own trumpet—hard. I was so happy about it that I was almost rude to them. I said to the artist:

'You were very wise, Boris Ivanovitch, to choose a pointer. Look at mine; she's ready in three weeks.'

Then I said to the doctor:

'You were very wise, Mikhail Ivanovitch, to pick out an Irish setter; you will have a lot of hard work with her, but you will be sure of having an irreplaceable dog when you have finished.'

Of course they had both heard of my unusual methods of training; in my way, I suppose, I was already a bit of a celebrity.

No. You young dog-lovers, sportsmen, young married couples, and poets—never trust any too sudden happiness; you must realize, on the contrary, that this illusion is in fact the biggest obstacle on your path, and you cannot rest on it, but must leap over it. For a week, no more, I hugged myself over the ideal pointing of my celebrated pedigree Kate. . . .

The marsh, where the hay had been cut and carried for over a week, was even greener than it had been before, and once, when we arrived there one grey day, it looked strangely inviting—it

looked as if the snipe would just have to show themselves. And in fact, as soon as Kate appeared, one did fly out. Then quite a young bird flew out from under her feet. Still not taking any notice, she went on making her point at the nest. Then another youngster flew out, then a third, a fourth, a fifth. . . . She still went on moving slowly forward, and just as before, stood stock still about five paces from the nest. When I went over to have a look at it, all I could find were a few eggshells.

I thought perhaps the nest was giving her more scent than the birds themselves, so I threw away the shells.

The next day she made her point at the nest itself.

I destroyed it; put some dried twigs in its place, and lit them.

Then she flushed a young bird with her foot and made her point at the bonfire.

That meant that from the very start she had been working solely from memory.

It meant that it was all outward show.

It meant that the dog was not using scent at all, but only going by imagination, like a scene from a play. This wasn't a dog—the sportsman's friend and assistant—the mother of keen-scented puppies—she wasn't a dog, she was an actress.

A good many sportsmen in similar circumstances would have given themselves the pleasure of shooting her out of hand. I made up my mind, however, to try and persuade her former owners to take her back, pointing out, incidentally, the usual fate of such animals in the hands of sportsmen.

The next time I had a chance to go out I amused myself by joining the boys in their duck shooting, but this is no great fun for me. For a week or so I went out looking for late broods of blackcock—but I am not overfond of this either. I prefer shooting the very late, adult grouse, and when the dog makes his point a terrific distance away, you have to judge for yourself how to meet their flight. When this comes off, the one you bag is worth ten of those that get away.

The mountain ash berries were getting redder and redder. The martins had gone long since. The swallows too were beginning to collect in flocks. The oats had been cut. The limes were yellowing from top to bottom, and so were the willows and birches in the marshes. There had already been two light frosts,

and the potato tops were black. The sportsman's heart was breaking; in the woods the fascinating black grouse, in the marshes the fat snipe, and in the fields the grey partridge.

I tried them all, but I was told:

'Last evening in the marshes Boris Ivanovitch bagged a double snipe flying.'

Then both grouse and partridge were ignored, and I went eight versts to the Lyakhov marshes, to watch the migrating birds, and if I shot two one day, and three the next, I was doing well.

One day in the very height of the double snipe season the terrible boots made by the old parson chafed my feet so badly that I found it was impossible to get to the marshes on foot. It would have been very expensive to hire a horse in working hours; besides, I didn't fancy the idea; that was how I had been brought up; I would never ride to a shoot.

I thought it over the whole of one day. In the big birches the golden nest. How mournfully, how pitifully Kate came up to me! How thin she had been getting lately!

I began to feel sorry for such a handsome dog. Because of the harvest the grey partridge had come right up to our yard; they were so close to us on the stubble that I had ceased to think of them as game, I was preserving them, instead of shooting them. Why not try the dog on them, and at the same time bag a brace or two for the pot?

I went out into the field in sandals. There happened to be a light breeze going. I set Kate off, like a yacht, tacking to windward. On one of the very first tacks she sniffed the air, jumped to one side, and stood quite still. She stayed like this for a moment, then leaped again to the other side, graceful as a ballerina, and stood watching the same spot. Then she started off, covering the space between me and the unseen point, cutting it into thin slices, like cheese. Then, catching the scent again, she could see she was not very far away now. Then she made her point, just as she had done with the empty nest.

She stood there, trembling all over like a motor, restraining herself with great difficulty from leaping at the spot the scent was coming from.

Then suddenly! . . . Have you ever heard the terrific swish a flock of grey partridge makes, about thirty of them, when it

takes wing? I shot first one, and then another. Both birds fell not far away.

And she had seen them!

Then, at last, I understood. I had been training her in a wooded swamp, surrounded by clumps of bushes, where there was not the slightest breath of air. There she had been quite unable to understand what was required of her, and just poked about with her nose to the ground. Here the breeze had immediately aroused that ability to use the sense of smell which had been killed in Moscow.

But once she had understood it with the partridge, we would have to try it out straight away in the open marshes on the snipe and woodcock. I had quite forgotten I had come out only in sandals, and had brought nothing to eat with me. How could I think of that now? We went straight to the Lyakhov marshes, half walking, half running, nearly eight versts.

Our first trial was in a very damp spot, the dog sank down nearly up to her belly. She went up to a blackened heap of straw, one of last year's stacks. At once she put up a double snipe and a common snipe. I managed to get the double snipe. But she soon found the bird I had missed, and I bagged that as well. And so it went on and on.

The Lyakhov marshes are about five versts long, and the sun was going down. I was so keen that I begged the sun to stay up a short while longer, but it sank without sympathy, and it began to grow dark. I was already shooting at random, without taking aim.

When I came out of the marshes into the stubble I felt a terrific pain in my foot; the stubble had pierced the blister; without knowing it I had lost one of my sandals a long while ago in the bog.

After many big and successful shoots in the Lyakhov marshes it so happened that one day Kate and I went into the boggy place where she had formerly made such an exhibition of herself, an exhibition that had been so nearly fatal to her. It just shows what a memory they have, for once again she worked towards the same empty place. But the scent of an actual snipe overcame her passion for acting this time, and throwing her stage tricks to one side, she led me to the live bird. I missed it on the rise, and I started to wave the barrel of the gun at him till the waving of

the barrel in the air seemed to form some kind of pipe, I aimed at the pipe, and the bird fell in the thicket. This time I sent the dog in to retrieve, and soon she came up out of the bushes with the snipe in her mouth.

YARIK'S LOVE STORY

Sometimes when I take a dog out into the woods with me I try to avoid using ordinary language, explaining what I want the dog to do by facial expression, movements of the hand or arm, or in the last resort by the use of indefinite sounds. It isn't an easy thing to manage, but the attempt to explain yourself to an animal without using words helps to concentrate your attention, and you begin to understand their ways as if they were your own. Consequently I seemed to understand the love story of Yarik and Kate better in their silence than if they had been able to talk to one another and I had overheard them.

Their first meeting was uneventful. He sniffed at her a little, didn't appear to be impressed, and left her and lay down in his corner. From this moment his character changed; for from the age of six weeks the ginger Adonis had been accustomed to our undivided admiration. As a rule I don't anthropomorphize or idealize animals, yet I have reason to think that to a sporting dog of the best breed the bond with his master during the chase is stronger than hunger; however hungry Yarik might be, he would always leave his food the moment he saw me with a gun. It was even stronger than love at the time of its most powerful physical influence. An example of this occurred just after we had adopted Kate. She began to give signs of being on heat, so we put Yarik out in the barn with the courser Solovyev. Ignoring her ailment, I kept on with her training in the woods and the marshes; we were living some distance from the village at this time, and there was little danger of her meeting other dogs. One day, reflecting on the strength of the hunting instinct in animals, I decided to risk an experiment and took Kate and Yarik out together. This was dangerous not merely because the German setter might couple somewhere in the bushes with her Irish counterpart, presenting me with a perfectly useless progeny of

mongrels, but mainly because Kate would be going out on the second stage of training without proper preparation, and this would probably spoil her for good. However, in my passion for psychological research into the canine mind, I decided to give it a trial, and sent them both away together, first in the field, and then in the bushes. That day I endured more than one moment of anxiety when both dogs, after disappearing into the thicket, failed to return. I dashed after them, but not finding them in that direction, began to follow the prearranged circuit—no signs of them—whistled—still they didn't come back. Then, losing my head completely, I rushed aimlessly into the undergrowth, cursing myself for my foolish and risky caprice. Luckily the rich coffee-and-white coat of the German setter met my wandering, anxious eye, and not far away I discovered Yarik as well. With his eyes riveted blindly on an invisible bird in the grass, he stood like a brazen image making his point, while behind him, still knowing nothing of the passion of the chase, and in evident perplexity, Kate was nosing the thick drops of crimson that had fallen on the grass among the forest flowers. There had been plenty of time for them to have greeted me in a totally different manner. I had been right; the sporting dog is such for the very reason that the art, from which it gains nothing for itself, is dearer to it than the most powerful passion, the passion that keeps the whole world in motion.

After this experiment I went home in a very cheerful frame of mind; it gave me the courage to acknowledge that at least once in my own life I had refused my own Kate, urged by a passion for some unattainable goal. I was glad to see that this happened to well-bred animals as well as to human beings; it meant that I was not alone in the world, and I know now that our greatest joy comes from the realization that in certain favourable moments we are not entirely alone in the world.

After this incident I had to keep Yarik in the barn with the coursers for some time, but I often went out to see him and pet him, calling him by a different, more human name. I used to pet Kate in the same manner, calling her Katyusha. This is one of my own original ideas—a double name for my dogs: one for use at work, the other at home; one for unconditional obedience to my commands, the other allowing the dog occasionally to act the despot with his master. Yes; just try yourself to play the part of

the strict trainer, when Yarik, with his fore-paws laid solemnly one across the other, lies like a sphinx in the window-seat, while in the rays of the sun his lovely coat gleams with tones seemingly unattainable to modern artists, tones that Titian alone would have been able to do justice to. In moments like these I say to him, for some reason:

'Kiryusha,[1] darling!'

He doesn't stir; on the contrary, knowing full well I am only admiring him, he holds his proud pose even more firmly.

But if I say, even in a whisper, 'Yarik!' he does something with his ears; relaxes somehow; spoils the splendid cross of his paws, and his tail begins to brush the floor with a soft thudding sound.

After the experiment in the woods I had many heart-to-heart talks with Yarik in the barn, but I realized from his proud manner a certain feeling of estrangement. When it was all over and we brought him back again into the house he altered his behaviour entirely. The soup would be poured into the dog's dish. This well-known sound brings Kate on to the scene, and there she stands expectantly, wagging her behind. At one time Yarik used to hurry in as well, but now he lies in the corner, taking no notice of the sound whatever, he is very uppish and doesn't like to put himself forward. He would even go so far as to get up unwillingly, even when he was directly called to his dinner. Before, when we were having our meal, he used to sit waiting for scraps, but now he lies under the table, while Kate takes over this duty, and badgers everybody so much that she becomes a nuisance and has to be put out. Even then Yarik refused to take his old place. We all understood that this was not the old Yarik, and that he would never forgive us for the appearance of Kate.

When the shooting season started again, I had reached an impasse with Kate; I still hadn't discovered her abilities, so I took Yarik with me. He then resumed his old status; turned up first when the dinner was given out, sat at table during meals, while Kate, behind him, waggled her behind and adopted such a hostile expression that often all she got from us was the order: 'Outside!' Towards the end of the season, however, Kate became so superior at her work that I lost all interest in taking

[1] Diminutive of Kyril (Cyril).

Yarik out. The quiet, clever methods of the German setter fascinated me, and I decided to change over to the breed permanently and see if I could get some puppies from her. In this part of the country the only mate likely to be suitable for her was a certain Jack, belonging to an artist I knew. Towards the end of the season we decided to introduce them, just to see how they got on together. It went marvellously. More often than not we were so lost in admiration at the clever way they went to work that we forgot to take aim; they would separate, come together again, then separate again; stop at the scent, move slowly forward, and finally stand motionless, looking round beseeching us to hurry up, while we just stood there admiring them. After the shoot we made ourselves some tea at the edge of the marshes and discussed the future offspring of our German Continental setters. The dogs themselves, dead tired, curled up at our feet like two loaves of bread. They slept soundly, without exciting themselves, as humans do, about the existence of the gods; we were their gods, and their fate lay in our hands.

During that winter the boys and I had the house to ourselves for several weeks, and when Kate started her games with Yarik we allowed them to run round the table, overturn the chairs, jump up on the settee, and pull the tablecloth, dishes and all, on the floor; we didn't even restrain them even when they warmed up and began to lap the water out of the clean bucket. The fooling of the two dogs fascinated us, and we decided to watch the game out to the end. At first Yarik, when his excitement passed all bounds, threw himself on the floor and lay belly upwards. Kate lay on top of him, harassing and pulling him about till he lay helpless, gasping, with his tongue lolling out. Yet Kate, cunning and subtle as a snake, and inexhaustible in thinking out new tricks, even Kate was going too far now. He jumped up suddenly, rushed at her from behind, caught her neck firmly in his paws, and tried to turn the tables on her. She stopped for a moment, reflected, then, baring her teeth in a snarl, she turned and bit him hard. With his tail between his legs, and a pitiful expression in his whole bearing, Yarik went over and lay down on his mattress, and for the rest of the evening sat staring fixedly at the leg of a chair.

The next day, as she stood waiting for him to join in the game, he refused to answer to her caresses, growling a warning, but

she took no notice, jumped at him, nipped him behind the ears, seized his tail, and pulled at him with her paws till his red coat began to fly out. Yarik had a way of his own with scraps of food we used to tease him with when we were fooling around; we used to tie them on a piece of string and wave it about in front of his nose; he would give the impression he was taking no notice, but he would watch it sidelong for some time, gauge the distance, and then suddenly catch it, and he never missed. So in the game with Kate; he waited, then suddenly snapped, judging the distance exactly, but he only managed to get in once this time. In return, he received a good nip. What a come-down for such a proud animal! He jumped in again, in spite of the sharp teeth, got another nip even harder than the first, and again returned to the attack. But at length she made him go back to his corner; and there he went over it all in his mind and saw himself no doubt as just a simple dog, pitiful, bitten, and imposed on. He was licking his wounds all the evening, and during the night began pacing from one corner of the room to another. He woke me up, and thinking he wanted to go out, I opened the door; but when he came back he still went on with his pacing back and forth. All that night as I lay dozing I heard the sound of his claws striking the dry, echoing floor.

In the morning I observed the usual signs on Kate, made a note of the date, and took Yarik out into the barn again with the hounds. After this it all proceeded according to the rules of breeding pedigree dogs. On the eleventh day Boris Ivanovitch turned up with Jack, and we put him in with Kate. According to our watches, the assignation took just over fifteen minutes.

The winter set in with morning and evening frosts. At night everything would be covered with the snow—but the wind blew down from the hills on the powdered snow, and the slopes gleamed with a blinding pure silver. The flying clouds heaped themselves over the snows; the blue sky lit up over the woods, the ravens were digging furiously, and the tomtits sang their courting songs, while in the tracks of the foxes appeared traces of menstrual blood.

The last few days of the seven-week canine pregnancy were approaching. Even the tiny nipples began to swell noticeably and the teats became a ridge, gradually acquiring the appearance of

the teats of the celebrated wolf which suckled Romulus and Remus. Kate didn't go out of action, as a human mother would, even during the last days; all the weight was underneath, where it ought to be, close to the ground. We bought some beef bones and made her some excellent broth, and mixing it with some oatmeal, gave her as much as she could eat. But she rarely ate it all, and Yarik would appear behind her from under the bench, approach very cautiously, and eat what was left; on the whole he had kept himself very much in the background recently. All day long he would sit in the window in his leonine pose, basking in the rays of the spring sun and probably dreaming of the coming days when the spring flight of the birds would begin. I too used to sit in the window a good deal, and very often, without thinking of Yarik at all, would turn my head from side to side exactly as he did, watching through the window what was going on outside in the snow. I was working out a new plan of training, during which the lessons would proceed in silence, and all orders would be given with the eyes only, or a wave of the hand. If this could be done, it would make it possible for the trainer to come to a complete understanding with the dog. Then, perhaps, you could understand their love, and I would be able to talk of Yarik's feelings during Kate's confinement just as Tolstoy wrote of Kitty and Levine.

While I was meditating on all this, turning my head with Yarik and following the blue shadows of the roving clouds over the snow, Kate came into the room looking for me, and seeing me in the window, ran up and asked me something. As I got up she ran to the door. I opened the door, but she immediately turned back and went inside again. I didn't guess what was happening at first, and stood for some time alone in the yard, but when I did go inside again I noticed a peculiar sound coming from Kate's room, a loud continuous licking and lapping. I went in to her at once, and there at her side was a little blind new dog with exactly the same coffee-coloured patches as her own. There was no need for us to help her, she did it all herself with her teeth and her tongue, cleaning them so nicely that the white of the puppies' coats gleamed like the first snows. It all went off very well, except that at the fifth her eyes became a faint blue, she weakened, and lay back for a time. But we gave her some wine, and she gave us the sixth and last. This, happily, was the

long-awaited Remus; we wanted dogs particularly, and there were only two—Romulus and Remus.

There was a short period of self-midwifery and washing—and it was all over, not a spot anywhere, and the clean-washed blind youngsters jumped up one after another with a squeak; they knew where to go, and found it at once, and began to suck. Now, you friends of life, come in and watch the eyes of the mother, in silence, for there is nothing you can say about it. . . .

So we stood and watched; but suddenly there was a change, the mother began to tremble, and a dark, evil look burned in her eyes, her hair rose from neck to tail. We looked round and caught sight of Yarik's ginger muzzle at the door; he wanted to come and have a look too. It was just as well he managed to turn round in time, or she would have had his throat; as it was she nipped him in the behind. He was off with a squeal, and she followed him right to the kitchen. Then she came back and lay down, trembling lightly the rest of the evening.

One or two visitors came to see us, and at tea I told them the dogs' love story; how during her first heat he had made his point at the unseen game, not noticing Kate at all; how, during the winter, they had played together for months on end; then about Jack, and Kate's unaccountable hatred when Yarik also wanted to come and have a look, poking his ginger head round the door.

'Why unaccountable?' asked one young lady, very experienced in matters concerning love. 'If I had known such a Yarik, I would have torn him to pieces.'

'But it wasn't his fault,' I replied. 'It was we, their gods, who changed the course of their romance, and put Jack in place of Yarik.'

'Even the gods make mistakes sometimes,' she replied. 'He had his chance in the bushes, but instead of taking it, stood like a fool, pointing a bird he couldn't see.'

THE MARSHES

I KNOW it comes to but few to wait in the marshes in spring in the hope of seeing the courtship of the blackcock, while I have no words even to hint at the wonder of the bird chorus there before sunrise. I have often noticed that the first note in that chorus, far in advance of the first gleam of light, is that of the curlew. This is a very thin trill, quite unlike the well-known whistle. Later, when the white partridge cry, the woodcock gabble, and the blackcock starts its muttering sometimes at the very door of the shack, there is no chance for the curlew; but later still, when the sun comes up, at the most solemn moment of all, you gradually become aware of its new song, very cheerful and almost like a tune for dancing; this dancing tune is as inseparable from sunrise as the heron's cry. Once from the shack I saw among the black crowd of game a hen curlew establish herself on a tuft of grass; the cock flew down to her, and supporting himself in the air with the sweep of his great wings, he swayed over the hen's back and sang his dancing song. The air was shaking with the song of all the marsh birds, and I remember the pools were swarming with the rising gnats.

The sight of the long, curved beak of the curlew always carries me back in imagination to the distant past, when man had not yet appeared on the earth. . . . Yes, everything is strange in the marshes; they have been little studied, and they are almost untouched by the artists; there you always feel as if man had not yet begun on the earth.

Once I went into the marshes to walk the dogs. It was very muggy after the rain and in expectation of more rain to come. The dogs ran here and there with their tongues hanging out, every now and again plunging into the marsh pools up to their bellies like pigs. It was clear that the young birds had not yet emerged from the undergrowth, to gather in the open; and in this swamp, usually teeming with game, the dogs could scent nothing at all, and for want of something to do were getting excited over a passing crow.

Suddenly a large bird appeared, she began to cry anxiously, and describe a wide circle round us. A second curlew joined the first in a wailing, circular flight, while a third, clearly a stranger, cut across them, but soon cooled down and disappeared. I wanted a curlew's egg for my collection, and knew that their circling flight would gradually reduce as I approached their nest, and widen again if I went away, so I began, like playing a game of blind man's buff, to find the nest by sound. Thus little by little, as the sun began to grow large and red through the warm mist, I could feel myself getting nearer; the birds cried unbearably, and in the red sunshine I could clearly distinguish their long, curved beaks, wide open with their constant wailing. At length the dogs, taking the scent, made their point. I followed the direction of their eyes and noses, and saw straight in front of me two large eggs lying on a dry, yellow strip of moss near a small bush, with no attempt at concealment or preparation. Giving the dogs the order to lie down, I looked round happily: the mosquitoes were biting hard, but I am used to that, I felt even grateful for these guardians of the swamp, these biting demons that keep offthe week-enders and other wanderers; thanks to them the marshes remain almost the only virgin country left, only attracting those who can stand a good deal without losing their temper. How good it was in this unspoilt marsh, and what distant periods of the earth's history were called up by these great birds with their long curved beaks cutting across the red disc of the setting sun!

I was just bending down to pick up one of these splendid eggs when I suddenly noticed, down there in the bog, the figure of a man approaching straight towards me. He had neither gun nor dog, nor even a stick in his hand; there was no path here for anybody to anywhere; and I knew nobody who could, like me, stand the biting mosquitoes and walk in the marshes for sheer pleasure. I felt as uncomfortable as if, when brushing my hair in front of a glass, and making a special face at myself, I had become aware of a stranger standing behind me, watching me and studying me carefully. I left the nest without taking the egg I wanted, so that this stranger should not embarrass me with his questions; I felt that this moment was too precious to me for that. I ordered the dogs to remain quiet and led them towards a piece of rising ground. There I sat on a grey stone, the top covered with yellow lichen, so that it was not cold to sit on. As soon as I went away the birds widened their circle, but now I took no interest in their flight, I felt too uneasy at the nearness of this stranger. I could now take a good look at him: middle-aged, and very spare, he walked along slowly, closely watching the flight of the birds. I felt easier in my mind when I saw him change his direction and climb another slight rise, where he also sat on a stone and rested. I even began to like the idea that over there sat another human being like myself, contemplating the evening in peace. We seemed to understand one another perfectly well without words; indeed there was no need for words. With redoubled attention I watched the birds intersect the red disc of the sun; my thoughts strangely busy with distant periods of the earth's history and the short story of humanity; truly, it had soon passed.

The sun went down. I looked over to my friend, but he was no longer there. The birds had gone too; clearly, they had settled on their nest. Calling the dogs, and fearing I should be too late, I approached the nest in silence; perhaps I might be lucky enough to see them sitting. I knew exactly where the nest was, by the little bush, and was very astonished when the birds allowed me to come so near. At last I came to the bush itself and stood flabbergasted, the place was empty! I touched it with the palm of my hand, it was still warm where the birds had been sitting.

I had only looked at the eggs, but the birds, fearing the eyes of man, had made haste to hide them further away.

And on the edge of the marshes there were people living who still feared the evil eye.

Through the gloom of nightfall, with the sun's red globe still in my eyes, I went homewards, and I saw that the fear of the common people for the evil eye had been preserved from the distant days when they also lived like birds.

THE OLD WOMAN'S PATH

In the woods there was a lunatic clearing running between the cranberry bushes and the moss-grown whortleberries; it twisted about in such a zigzag manner that if you got lost in the bramble thickets you were never sure which side the path ran. I often lost myself here looking for this Old Woman's path that I had heard so much about. I had been told that an old woman from the village of Skorenino went into the woods at Serkova gathering cranberries and never returned; probably she fell in the bog. She was so ancient they didn't even go and look for her. They blamed the young people of the present day for this; they were supposed to have said: 'Why bother to search for her? She's fallen in the bog, and there you are; even if we found her she wouldn't have much longer to live.' Not that their elders were much better; they didn't say much, but one old man, trying to reckon how old she must have been, remarked: 'That old lady was three days short of a rouble.'[1]

However, the old lady had at least one memorial in Serkova, the path she took for the last time looking for cranberries. I had heard from one sportsman that the thickets behind the Old Woman's path were a goldmine as far as game was concerned. He described it to me in great detail, but like all peasants he was unable to conceive of anybody being a stranger in the woods. He named a certain path, and said: 'You go straight along this path without turning either to the right or the left.' When you do find the path he refers to, you walk along a little way, and come to a maze of others leading away in all directions, and as far as you can tell they all lead straight ahead. I have found myself in that predicament times without number, but only lately have I been

[1] I.e., a rouble = 100 copecks.

able to work out a theory of how these peasants get their 'straight along'. I think the reason is that they always have their destination in their minds, so everything is 'straight' to them, while strangers, not being very sure where they are going, can never go 'straight' there. The times I got lost looking for this Old Woman's path! Every time it was only my compass which saved me from the fate of the old woman herself. More than once I met others during these searches: a peasant looking for his cow, a woman picking berries, a villager cutting grass in the marshes, or looking for wild bees; there were few people in the woods, and not one of them had ever heard of the Old Woman's path.

Once I even got rather scared. It was like this. . . . I was walking along a clearing which I suspected was the one I had been looking for, and came across a clump of nettles growing right across the path, very thick and as high as a man. I thought to myself: 'Nobody could have come along here while that nettle was growing.' As I was thinking about this, suddenly, out of the nettles . . . it was nothing very remarkable, the bush swayed and a little bird flew out. But I was beginning to feel distinctly uneasy in this swampy wood; if you lose your way you soon begin to tire yourself right out. The trees stood all round in the black, oozy mud, and this Old Woman's path, if this really was the path, did not look feasible to me. I felt for my compass again and froze in dismay—I had forgotten to bring it! Suddenly an oriole began its song, and I thought: 'Surely that golden bird cannot be singing in a place like this.' I followed the oriole's voice, that musical, golden bird, and soon found myself on dry land again.

After many failures I happened to meet a man from the same village as the old woman's, and he gave me the right direction. This sort of thing happens continually, and the sensible stranger must make allowances for it: every village on the outskirts of a forest, a lake, or a swamp knows its own neighbourhood alone; as for any distance away—that's no business of theirs—where their land finishes everything finishes.

Following his directions I came to that same patch of nettles at which I had shied before, but this time I noticed a way round it by jumping from one hummock of grass to another. My friend the sportsman had not been telling fairy tales; there was plenty of game there: I shot woodcock, white partridge, and even had

the good fortune to bag an old capercaillie. After the capercaillie it began to get very hot and the bag very heavy, so I sat down for a rest in the shade of a thick juniper.

As usual, my dog had a bell, so that I could follow him by ear in the thick woods. They also have bells on cows sometimes. The birds are usually afraid of dogs with bells, taking them probably for cows. The women too, silently gathering berries, as long as she was invisible to them, thought the dog was a cow. But it so happened that Kate, with her birch-coloured coat and her bell, ran very close to one old woman and frightened her, and she cried:

'Svat!'[1]

And on all sides the shout was repeated:

'Svat! Svat! Svat!'

I could see the women's idea, of course: when one of them felt in danger, they all backed her up; trying to make the enemy believe that they were not alone, and that they had a man with them. But they overdid it; there were too many voices for all of them to have a single father-in-law, or for them all to have one each. I tried to calm the women by calling the dog back, but this only scared them more than ever. This frequently happens with these women: they all want to gather the most berries, there is no limit to their keenness, and they forget everything in their absorbing search. When anything suddenly scares them, they act as if they had never in all their life seen things with birch-coloured coats with bells round their necks. And when they heard the voice of the owner of the wood himself, their alarm grew, and they all cried without rhyme or reason:

'Svat! Svat! Svat!'

Some of them started to run in all directions. Not far from where I was sitting in the juniper I heard the bushes being trampled down, and an old lady with a beard came tearing through. Her skirts were tucked up with a belt round her waist, and she was wearing a pair of men's thigh boots. She gave me quite a scare. The main thing was the beard; I was half afraid this might be the Old Woman of the path herself. . . .

She was rushing straight towards me; there was a possibility that catching sight of me unexpectedly, she would die of fright, like the Queen of Spades. I shouted hurriedly:

[1] I.e., father-in-law.

'Grannie! I'm only a sportsman. Don't be afraid!'

But she didn't hear me, and didn't see me either, although she was looking straight at me. She came straight on towards me, because in any case there were magic powers all round her, and she was charging forward with a lunatic courage, as in an attack, with one prayer on her lips:

'Svyat! Svyat! Svyat!'[1]

The other women shouted with her:

'Svat! Svat! Svat!'

The old woman passed so close to me that my hat was caught in her basket, and I could see her pale, livid lips muttering sometimes 'Svyat' then 'Svat'. I jumped up and tried to grasp the hat, but only succeeded in catching the old woman's basket. There was a sudden transformation when she looked back at me with angry, flashing eyes, she looked years younger, and there was even a touch of red on her cheeks. She spoke with the same emphasis as the young women use to repulse a young man who tries to take liberties with them:

'Oo-oo! Shame on you!'

But I had lost all my fear of the queer old lady.

'My hat,' I said, 'you've got my hat.'

She pulled herself together, and when she saw my hat in her basket her face was lined with tiny, good-natured wrinkles, and her eyes watched me in an amused manner. I wondered where I got the beard from—it was nothing more than the usual old woman's double chin.

She noticed a certain embarrassment in my expression, put her nose in the air, and said:

'You look to me like an idiot, with straw in your hair.'

All the others gathered round, and we began to get very merry. That's the women all over; till the man appears, they are scared stiff, but if you show yourself and start talking to them, they'll take their skirts off for you. One shameless hussy even tried to embrace me, gun and all.

[1] 'Svyat', i.e., 'Holy! Holy! Holy!'

THE WHITE DOG

The boys had been in our hayloft all day playing cards, and singing:

Rain again,
Rain again,
Rain again on a Saturday.

Saturday it was, in fact, and pouring with rain all day. I am very fond of this pleasant little song, and sat listening to it and to the rain as I went on with my writing in the window-seat. The singing suddenly stopped. I looked out and could scarcely believe my eyes: the card-players were all setting out for the woods, accompanied by a girl under an umbrella, wearing a short town skirt and white stockings. They were all laughing and joking together, and it looked very much as if the whole village were going out for a walk in the woods on a Whit Sunday. My landlord muttered something I didn't quite catch as usual; there had been something wrong with his tongue from birth. The only time we could ever understand what he was talking about was when he shouted loud enough to waken the whole street; for that reason he was known as the Loudspeaker. Another peasant, Abram Ivannitch, a former kulak, had been sitting on the bench outside the cottage. He got up, gestured towards the wood, and whispered:

'All this business of taking the young lady for a walk is only a blind; they are all going out on a man-hunt.'

From his story, not too clearly told, I gathered that one of the village women had seen a bear in the raspberry canes; but it turned out not to be a bear at all, but a man, and this man had something like a den lined with moss, and a fire built outside. This unknown man carved sticks, and he had some pieces of wire as well; he would put a mushroom on the wire, toast it at the fire, and eat it; he gathered berries too—blackberries—and ate them. . . .

'I've seen him!' I said. 'I went along there last night; the dog started to bark, and there he was, sitting by himself. I didn't take any notice of him; I was just walking along; and why shouldn't he sit there?'

'You ought to have told us about him—we don't know who he is—and that's a serious matter.'

Soon we heard a lot of shouting and noise; the folks came running out of the village, shouting: 'He's caught! They're bringing him in now!' The rest of the village came out into the street, and Loudspeaker walked up the street, with Abram Ivannitch following discreetly.

I decided to stay where I was. I could see all that was going on from my window, for they had all come up along the road from the fields, and had collected in a group outside the chairman's cottage. An old woman, Loudspeaker's aunt, came across and told me it was a real bandit with a gun.

The crowd in front of the chairman's cottage were making a tremendous din, and you could only pick out the separate voices of Abram Ivannitch and the Loudspeaker every now and again. Various friends came to my window from time to time giving me a running commentary on the proceedings. Perhaps it was just as well for me to be keeping my position as an onlooker; if the crowd suddenly decided to take the law into its own hands, my final appearance might save the man's life.

'I suppose his real offence is carrying a gun?' I asked.

'No, that's Mishka's gun,' they replied. 'When they went out into the woods singing, Mishka slipped into his den and held the gun to his head. That's how they caught him.'

'What's he done wrong, then?'

'He hasn't got an identity card. He spins a yarn about being homeless; he says he finished school in a boy's home where he was taught carpentry, and was even sent to a factory, but he didn't like it there, so he took to the woods and makes walking-sticks, and sells them at ten copecks a time, and that's how he makes a living.'

'And why not?' I asked. 'There are plenty of mushrooms and berries about, and he's not bothering anybody. . . .'

'But what about the identity card?'

'Bother the identity card!'

Soon it began to get dark, and the crowd round the bandit approached our house. Apparently it was our turn to provide accommodation for the night, and I would have welcomed the chance to get to know this interesting young fellow, but Loudspeaker's aunt came out with a rouble in her mouth and crossed

over to a poor neighbour's. There they were prepared for anything, and seeing the rouble between the old lady's lips, they agreed to let the bandit spend the night with them. It was already pretty well dark by this time, so I didn't get much chance to get a good look at him, but from what I did see of the features of this beardless boy—round, naïve, and with large, bright eyes—seemed quite pleasant. However, there are plenty of bandits about with pleasant features.

Gradually the crowd cleared, but Abram Ivannitch was still talking to the chairman:

'You'll have to send for the militiaman and arrange a guard for the night.'

The chairman vacillated, but the village cattle-herd went grinding on:

'What if he turns out to be a real bandit with a price on his head, and runs away in the night?'

The chairman was silent.

'You'll have to answer for him.'

The rain began to drum on the roof again, monotonous November rain, like a stage direction of Chekov's. That is the only thing in nature that I resent and fear: November, with its cold, driving rain; November, when old men like me catch a chill.

I felt the onset of depression, which would remain with me for days if I didn't stir myself to get rid of it, so I called the dog, took a gun, and set out into the gloom to entertain myself along the muddy forest road.

I had not gone much more than a verst into the woods when I heard what sounded like a cart approaching. Sometimes in the forest it is so quiet that you get as nervous as an animal and take fright at the least thing. When it comes to the pinch, of course, I can hold my own with the best of them, but deep down inside I feel as cowardly and as superstitious as any savage. During the war I was secretly rather ashamed of this internal weakness, till a friend of mine, a colonel famous for his courage, admitted to me that he was just as bad. So now in the gloom and silence of the forest I could hear the cart coming towards me, and the thought kept running through my mind: 'It's coming for me! It's coming for me!' I would have jumped to one side into the wood and let this terrifying cart go by, but the road was

bordered by a wide ditch on either side, and in the darkness it was impossible to gauge the distance, for the unusually wet summer had turned these ditches into rivers. The only thing that remained was to go back—but this is where I differed from the real coward—it would have looked bad for a man with a dog and a gun to run away from an imaginary terror.

'Carry on, my friend!' I said to the dog.

She kept at my heels.

'Go on!' I repeated.

She went forward a few paces and stopped again.

A horse's white head appeared and seemed to hang there in the gloom. The horse, apparently, had seen my dog.

The white dog!

'Forward!'

The dog went forward slowly.

The white dog!

In the twinkling of an eye there was neither horse nor cart on the road, nor anybody driving; it all swayed and broke and fell into the ditch.

Whether the thousand-year-old white stone at the cross-roads or the centuries-old signpost was to blame or not, they must have heard a good deal of cursing in their time, when the scared horses shied at them and turned aside into the ditch, breaking the shaft of the cart. In any case a local peasant, whether a cyclist at whose appearance a load of cucumbers is overturned, or even a sportsman with a white dog through the gloom, neither will stop to help; in these parts even a black tree-stump or a white milestone will be taken for an enemy and shot at.

I went on for some time without looking round, and only turned back when on any reckoning the man, or whoever it was, would have had time to get himself out of his difficulty and cooled down a bit. When I reached the site of the accident I struck a match; there was no sign of a horse or a man anywhere, but in the ditch lay a cart with a broken shaft.

When I reached the village I was greeted with the news:

'There are bandits in the forest.'

They told me that some armed men had attacked a young woman, but luckily, when the horse jumped to the side of the road the shaft of the cart broke, and she was able to jump up on the horse and escape.

There was no need for me to say anything about the white dog, was there?

Near the cottage where they had put the arrested man stood a sentry, and the village elder had gone with an armed guard to fetch the militiaman.

At dawn Kharitonitch the militiaman arrived. A great lover of the chase, and a man to whom I had often given advice about training his dogs, he came straight over to see me, and I told him quietly about the adventure in the woods the night before, and about the pleasant features of the young bandit. Actually the early morning light was more effective than anything we could do. When we went to look at him, we saw a mild, composed, and smiling youth, and as we listened to his story about his life in the woods, not only was there no doubt in our minds regarding its truth, but even the peasants laughed at themselves. Kharitonitch wanted to let him go at once, but the restless Abram Ivannitch reminded him again about the passport.

We all have our jobs to hold down, and Kharitonitch would have been obliged to take the young fellow away, but here his flair for detective work stood him in good stead. He happened to notice some letters on one of the carved sticks, rubbed them up with his finger, and showed them to us. We read:

'Yegor Simeonitch Yershov.'

'Who's Yegor Simeonitch?' he asked the lad.

'Yershov,' he replied.

'But who's Yershov?'

'Me.'

All sixteen sticks had the name Yegor Simeonitch Yershov carved on them.

'There you are,' said Kharitonitch. 'There's his identity card!' and let the lad go.

After this incident whenever the peasants spoke to me of Kharitonitch, they assured me that Solomon himself couldn't have delivered a wiser judgement.

THE WARM PLACE

Whenever Nerl came back from our trips to the marshes, cold and wet, her mother Kate always scolded her, knowing very well that Nerl would go straight to her warm bed, wet as she was. Yet when Nerl had a day off, and Kate herself came back wet through, the inquisitive young Nerl, wondering what we had shot during the day's sport, would jump down and come and look, and Kate always took her place. Sometimes I had no intention of going out shooting, but would just go in to see how the dogs were. They would both jump up, pushing themselves forward:

'Take me! Take me!'

I would look first at one, and then at the other. Both had one single thought in their minds; the hope that I should take her and not the other; in their excitement they would put their paws on my chest. But this was strongly forbidden. I would give the order:

'Lie down! We're not going out at all to-day.'

And they would go away and lie down, but Kate invariably lies down in Nerl's place, and Nerl in her mother's. Each dog believed that the place occupied by the other would be warmer than her own.

SNAKES

In the marshes you sometimes notice a small hole under one of the grassy hummocks. If you blow the smoke of a cigarette down the hole, very often an adder will crawl out on the other side. On a sunny day it will settle on the top of the hummock, and curling itself round in a ring will lie there sunbathing for hours. As a rule the peasants working in the marshes go barefooted, and there are frequent cases of snake-bite in the villages. Very often the cattle suffer as well. As a consequence there is war to the death between the snakes and the peasants. The stupid ones attack them with sticks, shouting and cursing: 'Take that! And that!' and often leave the dead snake in the

middle of the path. The sensible ones get the job over as quickly and as quietly as possible, clenching their teeth, and burying the body immediately; they think the flies and mosquitoes act as carriers of the poison and will infect both man and beast.

One day in the marshes I met a peasant and his wife; he carried the scythe and she the rake. The man stopped for a moment for a chat, while his wife went on to their plot to start work. Suddenly we heard a cry:

'I can see three snakes!'

The man broke off a stick and hurried over to his wife, and I could see he was busy in the bushes.

'I've got one of them, the biggest.'

He beat about him with the stick, and then took his axe, as if he had done this hundreds of times before, cut off the top of a hummock, threw the snake down, and covered it over again. Afterwards he came back and said rather gloomily:

'That's the first time in my life I've ever killed a snake.'

I was very surprised at this; he had disposed of it so quietly and efficiently that it was difficult to believe him. But he was obviously a sensible fellow and very capable.

After he had gone back to help his wife I saw a very old friend of mine, Nikolai Vassilitch, coming along the path through the marshes. He was considered one of the most intelligent men in the district, in fact he had been elected chairman of the district executive committee for three years running.

In the course of conversation I mentioned to Nikolai Vassilitch that a few moments ago we had found three snakes near by, the biggest had been killed, but the two smaller ones had escaped.

'Good luck to them,' replied Nikolai Vassilitch. 'I always feel sorry for them when the peasants kill them; they never mean any harm, and always try to avoid the cattle. In fact they always give a warning with their hissing, but what can you expect when somebody treads on their tail?'

This was the first time in my life I had ever met anybody who stood up for snakes.

'You sound as if you sympathize with them.'

'That's quite right,' he said soberly. 'I do sympathize with them; snakes are harmless enough and very sensible creatures, yet we set about them and kill them.'

Nikolai Vassilitch was on the point of giving me an example of this when my dog scented game, and we had to separate.

One day the village lads were celebrating a holiday with a football match, while the older men sat on the benches and watched them, talking quietly between themselves.

As I was passing Nikolai Vassilitch called out to me.

'Stop!' he cried. 'Come and sit down, and I'll tell you about that snake.'

And this is the story he told me.

'When I was chairman of the district committee I had to go through the marshes almost every day for some time. One day I saw a snake curled up on the top of a hummock in the sun. I went up to it, and it raised its head and watched me. Then it lowered its head again. I walked away and looked round quickly; the snake had raised its head again and was following me with its eyes. You see what I mean by sensible?'

'No, I don't,' I replied.

'Wait a minute, let me finish my story. The next day I went along the path again at about the same time and looked round—there was the snake lying on the same spot. It raised its head again and watched me pass. That happened every day for a week; every time I went by it raised its head. You see what I mean?'

I made a guess:

'You think it recognized you?'

'I'm sure of it. But listen. . . . I was coming back from a committee meeting one day with one of the peasants, looking for a cow he had lost in the woods. When we got to the place where the snake had been he walked straight over into the bushes, and barefooted too. "Look out!" I said, "there's a snake over there!" "How do you know?" "Look! There it is!" And there the snake was. Not being a very intelligent man, he was scared at me. "How could you tell it was there?" he asked. I told him the whole story, and he went for me: "Why didn't you kill it?" I said to the peasant: "That's how sheep behave: what one does, they all do. But this snake knew me, so I didn't kill it." He laughed, and went off to look for his cow. The next day I looked under the bush for my snake, but it had gone.'

I thought Nikolai Vassilitch had finished his story, so I started to tell him what I thought of it:

'I like your story very much, it sounds credible; after seeing you every day for a week the snake knew you, but when a noisy, stupid peasant came along, it went away.'

'Wait a minute, I haven't finished yet,' said Nikolai Vassilitch. 'I thought to myself: "It can't have gone very far away, it must be somewhere about." I went round the thicket, and there it was, lying on the other side. It lifted up its head and recognized me again. That day I was coming back from the committee with one or two people. After a slight shower of rain the mushrooms started to come up. One young fellow said:

'"Look, there's a red-head. Let me get it for you."

'"Wait a minute," I said, "there's a snake over there."

'"How do you know?"

'He laughed, and jumped into the bushes. I caught hold of him by the wrist and showed him the snake. Then they all began to wonder till I told them the whole story. But one old man with white hair grumbled:

'"Why ever didn't you kill it?"

'I went over the whole thing again for him; how I passed the spot every day, and the snake raised its head; then when somebody else came along, it changed its place, and recognized me.'

'The old man went for me there and then:

'"These snakes do no end of harm to the cattle, and he fools about with them, and he's the chairman of the committee! Stop, lads!"'

'But the lads had already got their sticks ready to kill it.

'"There you are, lads!" shouted the old man. "Give it to him!"

'I'm sorry to say that I tried to get out of it with a weak excuse, like a child:

'"Daddy, I've never killed a snake before in my life."

'"Stop, lads!" said the old man. And they all had their sticks ready.

'"Wait a minute, lads," said the old man. "Our chairman here says he's never killed a snake before. Now we can teach him."

'What could I do? I killed it. If I had to do it, I would kill another, but for myself I wouldn't touch them, they are such sensible creatures; they give their hiss as a warning, but the

cattle don't hear it and tread on them. And our peasants are as bad; shoes are cheap enough, they could easily make themselves leggings out of an old boot-top; but no, the thick-heads, they must go through the bushes in their bare feet.'

THE RIDDLES OF THE WOODS

THERE were plenty of woodcock in the forest; all the ant-hills showed their footprints. But one hillock had a rather different appearance; there was quite a deep scrape at one side, and I could not for the life of me guess what woodland creature had made such an onslaught on the republic of the ants.

It is very annoying sometimes to go about your business with these riddles of the forest unsolved, yet it happens often enough. Nature poses thousands of questions, and there is nowhere you can seek an answer, except in your own head. Usually I go on and leave the problem unanswered, but keep it in mind, trusting that later on I shall find the solution in the woods themselves. I remember when I was a youth being confronted with the problem of the origin of the grassy hummocks in the marshes. I read a lot of books about it at home, but none of the answers they gave satisfied me; there appeared to be plenty of reasons for it, but they all seemed rather vague and improbable. One day in the woods I came to a wide clearing and sat down for a short time. All over the clearing there were the remains of the tree-stumps in the damp places, and between them a fresh carpet of moss had started to grow; it was a most beautiful green colour, almost as

if the moon rather than the sun were shining on it. And everywhere on this moonlit green carpet there were little mounds. It struck me there and then that this was how the hummocks start. But even this explanation was hardly sufficient; it was easy enough to see how the hummocks had developed from the little mounds, but how had they got there in the first place? But here my hands came to my help; I pulled away the mossy covering, and underneath appeared an old, rotting birch stump.

Walking through the woods these problems were cropping up all the time, but the answers came only when I sat down to rest for a while. This is what happened in the case of the ant-hill. I began to feel like a cup of tea. So I unscrewed the top of my thermos and I sat down under a pine tree on a soft mossy hillock, poured out some tea, and started to drink slowly, sitting perfectly still, and gradually merging myself in the life of nature around me. A warm, dark rain-cloud covered the sun. Everything seemed to be lost in thought, in the deep silence which comes before the rain. In the distance I could hear the flutter of a woodpecker; the sound grew louder and louder, and . . . hello! . . . there he was perched at the very summit of my pine tree. He sat up there for some time as if he too were lost in thought, and once or twice looked round him in a very amusing manner. Downwards, at the strange monster below him, he didn't look at all. I had often noticed this with birds; they turn their heads from side to side, but never look beneath them. Not only woodpeckers, but capercaillie as well, had perched over my head like this during my woodland picnics. So the woodpecker took no notice of me at all and later came down to that very same ant-hill that had posed the riddle, and there was the solution before my eyes: he started to forage there with his bill in the side of the mound, finding food for himself.

And one day that summer—what a day it was!—there were so many riddles cropping up all at once that I ended by cursing a perfectly innocent old woman. That day Nerl, a young dog I was training for the gun, got out of hand in the marshes. She ignored my whistle, and as a result the woodcock flew out without a point. I was very angry and completely lost my head; for one thing I badly wanted the game, and apart from that I was trying to train the dog. I missed time and again, and finally without stopping to get rid of a bee which was furiously buzzing

in my hair, rushed up to the dog, who was still chasing the bird. At last, after pulling myself together a little, I got the dog to heel, took off my hat, ruffled my hair, shook myself, and the buzzing stopped.

Having lost the bee I felt a little more comfortable, and turned my attention to the birds again. I let Nerl away once more, but when she was about fifty paces away she started the same performance, creeping forward slowly towards the quarry, balancing first on one paw and then on another. I hurried forward to stop her, but stepped with both feet into a patch of mud. I had hardly struggled out of the mud before I heard once more that confounded bee buzzing in my hair louder than ever.

'Chirrk!' and the woodcock flew out without a point.

I was too late to take aim. And it was a fine bird, too. . . . Suddenly I heard a woodcock chirrup again, without flying out. This was unusual, unheard of. 'Chirrk!'—behind me this time. I turned round; but there was nothing there. I listened hard. The bee was still buzzing in my hair, and a magpie chattered in the thicket. I came to the conclusion that in my excitement I had mistaken the magpie's cry for the woodcock. But suddenly again: 'Chirrk!' and this time it was the magpie itself. I was so angry I cursed the old woman I had met earlier on, who, instead of the customary greeting: 'Neither feather nor fur!' had, in her pureness of heart, wished me: 'I hope you get a full bag, master!'

In this exasperated frame of mind I walked through the wood to a dry stream bed, and sat on an upturned log, and took my hat off again and went through my hair thoroughly, without finding the bee; the buzzing had stopped again. Gradually I regained possession of myself, and my usual confidence that I would finally solve the problem of my difficulties with the dog returned. The necessity for these guesses, I felt, arises from the uniqueness of the individual in nature; every human being, every animal, is in some way different from another, and consequently it is impossible to find a general rule which will cover every eventuality, and you have to find the solutions for yourself.

I was turning this over in my mind when Nerl got up quietly, sniffed at something on the ground, looked up at me in a timid manner, and started to move round in a narrow circle, then wider and wider. Giving her the signal to stand, I said softly: 'What is it?'

She made as if to return, but instead of coming straight back she began to weave backwards and forwards, and gradually moved further away. Again I said, very softly: 'What is it?'

At this point I noticed that Nerl, while on the scent, was trying to lift her head as high as possible, and was doing what had up to now been impossible for her, that is, working by her sense of smell. Then an idea flashed through my mind. I got up and went towards her, and as soon as she went more than ten paces away from me I said quietly: 'What is it?' Thus we approached the thicket. She stood quite still and I repeated: 'What is it?' and held her to her point. Immediately a blackcock flew out.

Naturally I hurried back to the marsh and started all over again, keeping her from going more than ten paces before me, making her keep her head well up to scent the quarry. Then I said softly: 'What is it?'

She stood perfectly still, lifting her nose higher and higher; at first she found she had her back legs crossed—this felt wrong, so she straightened up and began to paw at a puddle of water. . . .

I bagged that one, then another, and then a third; and by guessing and sheer stubbornness I gradually overcame the old woman's 'spell'. As far as the bee was concerned, it was still buzzing, but I solved that too in the end; it was not in my hair at all but had been trapped in the hat-band. And last of all—the woodcock-like 'chirrk' turned out to be in my own nose; tearing about in the damp marshes I had been breathing so heavily that my nose had been chirruping for all the world like a woodcock.

THE ZHALEIKA

Our shepherd at Pereslavishcha, who had been looking after the sheep for many years, played no instrument; he only whistled. But over in Zabolotye they go according to age; the shepherds blow the horn and the shepherd boys the 'zhaleika', in fact I always felt annoyed when I overslept and failed to hear their early-morning tune on the pipes, fashioned from wolf's bast and reeds, with a resonator of cow's horn. One day I made up my mind to try my hand at this music of the marshes, so I ordered a zhaleika and one was made for me.

I have a fairly good ear, and tried to puzzle out one of Tchaikovsky's romances, but like our shepherd, I couldn't make anything of it, and threw it on one side.

One day it rained steadily from morning till night, so I stayed at home all day and busied myself with my writing. In the evening the rain stopped, but the sunset was cold and yellow. I went out on to the porch, facing the evening sun, and began to play on my pipes. Whether the sunset inspired me, or the tree, I don't know—we had a large willow outside the cottage near the road; in the evening or the half-light of morning it always reminded me of a man's head with a nose and the hair brushed back—but I looked at this head and it all came very simply. There was no need to bother about opera or Tchaikovsky, all you had to do was let your fingers play over the stops, and the pipes of wolf's bast, reed, and cow's horn did the rest for you.

One or two village women came over and sat on the bench outside the cottage. I said to them:

'Well, young women, what do you think of that? I'm no worse than the shepherds from over the marshes, eh?'

'Better!' they replied. 'Much better!'

I went on playing for some time, while the sunset burnt itself out. A cart came along the road with a group of peasants sitting side by side. That's finished it, I thought; they're sure to start laughing at me. But to my astonishment they stopped the horse and stayed to listen with the women. When I finished playing I got up quickly and entered the cottage. The window was open, and I heard one peasant say, as he whipped up the horse:

'He's had his "kasha"!'[1]

Another remarked: 'Yes, you can't play like that on an empty stomach!'

I gathered from this that the peasants had taken me for the temporary shepherd[2] but living well in a fine house; I had had my 'kasha' and was playing to myself after supper.

[1] Broth or gruel.

[2] The Russian 'pastukh na cheredu' implies that he was taking his turn—'chered'—as shepherd.

EDUCATION

We were very tired plodding through the forest, and tortured with thirst. About midday the trees began to thin out and it became much lighter. When we got to the edge of the woods we saw under the hill the chimney of a cabin. Petya busied himself over the fire, while I went across for some water. Just as I was dipping the teapot in the brook I remembered we'd brought the teapot, but forgotten the cups. Not far away by the little cottage a man was busy digging a trench. I went up to him and wished him good day; all I wanted was to ask for the loan of some cups, but first he asked me for a smoke. After this the question of the cups was soon settled; he shouted through the window for the lady of the house, and she handed out two small china cups decorated with flowers. We all stood there chatting for some time; it appeared that the man was not the tenant, but a hired labourer from a village where a great friend of mine, a very learned man, was born.

'His father was the priest in our village,' said the labourer. 'He drank spirits, and died a bit cracked.'

'And the mother?' I asked.

'Our priest's wife was a very good-looking woman. They had five children, and they were all given a good education; they all did well for themselves.'

'I suppose he must have been a wealthy man, your priest?'

'No, he wasn't; that was just it! If it had been left to him, they would never have got on at all, but this is what happened. Not far from us, in a neighbouring parish, there was another priest, a widower, and a very rich man. Three times the burglars broke into the church; they thought he kept his money there; he was a very wealthy priest. Now our priest's wife used to visit him on the quiet, so they said. That's how all the children got their education.'

'Was that why your priest took to drinking spirits?'

The labourer laughed.

'You're good at guessing, aren't you? Of course it was through his wife that Father Ivan took to drink, and died a bit cracked.'

The housewife leaned out of the window and said inquisitively:

'Which priest did the children really belong to?'

'Of course, they were our priest's children. However, the mother visited the other father, so that they would get a good education.'

'She was a sensible woman,' said the housewife. 'What makes you say she drove your priest to drink?'

'That's simple. He was ashamed of his wife and he was miserable.'

'Your priest was a fool!' said the housewife. 'Why should he blame her? Another woman gives her life for her children, but that . . . Tphu!' the woman spat out of the window, 'I don't want to hear any more about it!'

And she shut the window in our face.

THE AUTHOR

The dew had dried from the bushes, but beneath them it still shone on the folds of the leaves which are never really dry. The cows were eating their fill, standing up to their shoulders in the marsh pool. The cowherd lay in an arch on the grass, he must have stretched himself out with his head on a hummock, but in his sleep his head and legs had slipped down, leaving his stomach in the air.

I knew him well—his red hair, his face covered with freckles, and his bright eyes, clean as a sweet when a child has been sucking it. I had elected him long ago to my kingdom of Berendei, and whenever I met him in the fields I never passed him without having a word with him. I had had a stroke of luck that morning and wanted to share it with him, so I nudged my little Berendean. He opened one eye for a moment, pulled a half-empty bottle out of his pocket, held it out to me, and went straight to sleep again. I shook him and shouted in his ear.

'Drink up!' he said. 'Last night I went to a party, but there's still a drop left.'

Then he came to himself properly, took a nip from the bottle, and I pulled the latest number of the *Sportsman* from my pocket, with one of my stories in it.

'Read that, Vanya. I wrote it.'

As he started to read I lit a cigarette and occupied myself with my notebooks for fifteen minutes—you can see from this that it

takes me exactly fifteen minutes to smoke a cigarette. When I finished it, he was still reading away. I interrupted him with the question:

'Show me how much you've read.'

He showed me: in a quarter of an hour he had read two lines and a bit, and altogether there were over three hundred.

'Give me the paper!' I said. 'I've got to get on. It isn't worth reading.'

He handed over the paper willingly enough, and remarked:

'You're right, it isn't worth reading.'

I was surprised. It isn't often you meet with such frank and good-natured criticism, even among the peasants. I was perhaps a trifle hurt, but pleased on the whole. He yawned and said:

'It wouldn't be so bad if you'd written the truth, but I expect you made most of it up, didn't you?'

'Some of it.'

'But if I wrote it, it would be different!'

'It would be more true to life, I suppose?'

'All of it. Suppose I wrote about night. How the night passes in the marshes.'

'Well, and how does it pass?'

'Like this . . . Night. A big bush by the pond. I am sitting under the bush, and the ducklings go—sveese, sveese, sveese . . .'

He stopped. I thought he was trying to think of a word, or was stuck for a metaphor. Then he fidgeted, picked up his pipe, and began to drill the seventh stop in it.

'Well, what next?' I asked. 'How would you describe exactly how the night passes?'

'I have described it,' he replied. 'That's how it goes. A big bush. I am sitting under it, and the little ducks, all night, go—sveese, sveese, sveese . . .'

'It's very short.'

'What do you mean, "short"?' The shepherd lad was surprised. 'That's just how the night goes—sveese, sveese, sveese . . .'

Considering the account, I commented:

'It's very nice.'

'Not bad,' he replied.

Then he began to play his pipe, fashioned from thistle stems, reeds, and cow's horn.

AUTUMN

THE EYES OF THE EARTH

Cold rain and wind from morning till night. More than once I have heard women who have lost their husbands or parents or children say that their eyes seem to die sometimes before they lose consciousness. Sometimes a dying man will even say: 'Oh! my dear—I can't see you'; this means that the eyes are dead and the tongue, perhaps, is trying to find an excuse. Here was the lake at my feet—in the folk-lore the eyes of the earth—and here I could well believe that the eyes die first and feel the death of the light; when in the forest the struggle for the light begins, and the tree-tops burst into flame and seem to set themselves alight—then the water lies dead and smells of the tomb with its cold fishes.

The rains had been a nuisance to the farmers. The martins had flown long ago, and the swallows were congregating in the fields. There had already been two frosts. The limes were yellow from top to bottom. The potato tops were black. They were spreading out the flax everywhere. The double snipe appeared. The long evenings began. . . .

THE ROBBER'S HAT IS ON FIRE

It was very peaceful in the marshes; the grass was covered over with a real frost, which was spread like linen, and not with the farmer's 'maross', or cold dew. It wasn't till eight o'clock in the morning that this real frost turned to dew, and the linen sheets under the bushes disappeared. Everywhere the leaves were withering. In the distance the spruce and pine said farewell to the birches, and the tall aspens lifted their red hats over the forest. Then I somehow remembered from my far-away childhood the old saying, which at that time was quite incomprehensible to me: 'The robber's hat is on fire.'[1]

But the swallows are still here.

[1] A proverb used in the sense of 'a guilty mind is never at ease'.

THE SLEEP OF THE BIRDS

The cold had killed all the spiders, and their webs had been broken by the wind and the rain. But the finest webs of all, on which the spiders had not spared their best workmanship and materials, were still undamaged by the autumn gales and still captured anything that could move in the air. But now the only flying things were the leaves, and so the gaudy autumn leaves, edged with drops of dew, were caught in the webs, where the wind rocked them as in an invisible hammock. For a moment the sun came out, and the dewdrops sparkled like diamonds. When I saw this I remembered that this autumn I, the old wildfowler, must get to know more about the habits of the capercaillie during this season, when their favourite delicacy is the autumn leaf. I had more than once heard and read that at the hour of sunset they would fly up into the aspen, peck around till dark, roost in the branches, and when they woke up in the morning start nibbling at the leaves again.

I came across them unexpectedly in a small clearing in the depths of the forest. As I forded the stream one of my boots

stuck in the mud, and the sucking sound when I pulled it out disturbed a hen capercaillie, which flew out of an aspen directly above my head. This tall tree stood on the very edge of the clearamong the pines and birches. The struggle for light between the pine and the spruce had made them grow very tall here. A few paces from the edge of the clearing ran a forest road, deeply rutted in the black earth, but under the aspen the leaves lay upon the black surface in a clear, yellowish-white patch visible some distance away; it would have been foolish to try and conceal myself near this patch, for the bird would be up in the tree itself. The clearing was a new one—last winter's—and the trees which had been left to be taken away next winter had grown darker during the summer, and were overgrown with young aspen saplings, with their typically large and brightly coloured foliage. On the older trees the leaves were already quite yellow. I moved very carefully from tree to tree. There was a slight drizzle of rain, and a light wind was blowing; the leaves of the aspens were shaking and rustling, the rain was pattering down, and through all this it was impossible to hear the sound of the leaves being torn off by the birds. Suddenly a capercaillie flew up from one of the saplings in the clearing and perched on a tree about two hundred paces from me, on the other side of the glade. Sometimes after a gust of wind it would become very quiet, and the sound of the tearing of the leaves came across quite clearly. I had heard that sound many times before in the woods. When the bird had nibbled at all the leaves within reach, he would try to jump to a lower branch, but this was too thin to support his weight, so the bird would go down lower and lower, supporting himself with his wings. Soon I heard a similar sound and a fluttering over on my side of the clearing, and I realized that all around me, hidden in the trees, there were more of these great birds. I also realized that in the daytime they wandered about the clearing, possibly in search of insects and the grit that is so necessary to them, and at night went up into the boughs, so that they could enjoy their favourite leaves before going to sleep.

As it almost always does in our part of the world, the west wind dropped a little before sunset. The rays of the setting sun shone through the branches. I curved my hand behind my ear and through the light rustle of the apsen leaves I could hear the sound of a leaf being torn away, a sound much louder and sharper

than the dull plop of falling water. Then I got up carefully and tried to find somewhere to hide. This was very different from walking in the woods during the spring chorus, when the bird can hear nothing, because he is so intent upon his own singing, which he directs somewhere towards the zenith. It became particularly difficult to get round one large pool, strewn with what appeared to be a thick layer of fallen leaves. Actually it was mostly mud, and very soft and deep. Each step had to be taken with the foot in line with the leg, like a ballerina, so that when it was pulled out it didn't make a sucking sound. And every time you take your foot out of the mud the water trickles from it and falls into the pool with a terribly loud plop. Then a mouse ran under the leaves, which separated after him like a furrow, with such a swish that if I had made any such noise the birds would have flown away long ago. Obviously they are used to it, and take no notice; it's only a mouse. And when the dry twigs rustle with the passage of a fox, the bird up there knows he is quite safe, it is just a fox going about his own business. For in the forest everything is clearly defined and rhythmically interconnected. But nobody knows what a man may take it into his head to do, so all his noises are sharply distinct from the ordinary run of woodland life.

However, keenness often develops unsuspected patience, and in time I might have achieved almost cat-like movements, but the time was up, the sun had set, and a little longer and it would be impossible to shoot. I had no doubt whatever that my bird was in the aspen on the far side of the clearing. But I could not make up my mind to get nearer to it, and even if I had tried I might not have succeeded. What was I to do? In the yellow crowns of the aspens there was but one narrow opening on the far side towards the sky, and this small window opened and closed from time to time. I guessed that this was my bird pecking at the leaves, his head closing the gap every now and then; I could even pick out his little beard. Not many of us can shoot at the instant of summing up a situation. But at this very moment there was a new trouble—an invisible twig under my feet cracked, and the window opened. . . . And even worse—sensing danger, the bird began to crow, as if it were swearing at me. Worse still, another bird much nearer to me dropped down from his twig and showed himself. He was too far away for me to shoot, yet I could not

have approached any closer, or he would certainly have spotted me. I stood perfectly still on one leg; the other, resting on the twigs, was almost without support. Then one by one other birds flew in for the night, and settled all round me. One of these started to tear the twigs from the tall aspens, those same twigs, cut away obliquely, by which we can always tell the nocturnal perches of the birds. However my bird gradually quietened down. In all probability he was sitting there with his neck stretched out, and looking round on every side. Down below where we were, I and the mouse, who was still rustling away, it soon grew completely dark. The bird I had seen had disappeared in the gloom. I assumed that they were all asleep by now, with their bearded heads hidden away under their wings. Then I lifted my benumbed foot and gratefully leaned my tired back against the same tree, in which the birds I had disturbed were now peacefully asleep.

It is impossible to describe in words the feeling of being in the deep forest at night, when you know that over your head the great birds are sleeping, the last survivors of an age of great creatures. And this sleep was not always peaceful—now and again one would stir and another preen itself. . . . Not that there was anything terrifying about being alone at night; on the contrary, I was as comfortable as if I were visiting family friends during a holiday. If it had not been so cold and wet I might have slept with the birds. Not far away was the forest pool, and the raindrops fell from the tall trees, some from a high branch, others from a low one, some drops were large, others small. When I heard these sounds and understood where they came from, then it all was changed into the most marvellous music, instead of the usual kind of thing to which I had been accustomed. And then, when everything in the forest settled down during the night to the melody of the raindrops, suddenly I heard an indescribable snoring. . . .

It was not so much fear at the bursting of this indescribable sound into my wonderful concert which made me go; but whatever it was, I made haste to get away from this savage forest, where somebody or something snored like nothing upon earth.

As I went through the village on my way home I could hear them snoring on every hand, both beasts and men; after hearing it in the forest it seemed to force itself on my consciousness.

When I came to the house, Siryozha the farmer's son was snoring wildly in the storeroom, and Domna Ivanovna and the rest of the family were snoring in the kitchen. But strangest of all, besides the heavy snoring of the cattle in the yard, I heard the thin snoring of other creatures, and I discovered with my flashlight that this was the geese and fowls snoring as well. . . .

Even in sleep I couldn't get away from these snores. As so often happens in dreams, I remembered things that would never see the light of day again. That night all my old bird-like dreams came back to me. . . .

Then I realized that in the woods this had been nothing else than the capercaillie itself snoring, it must have been! I jumped out of bed, put the samovar on, drank some tea, took the gun and set out for the old place in the woods. I leaned my back against the same tree and waited for the dawn. Now, after hearing the fowls and the geese, I could pick out the snoring not only of the bird roosting over my head, but also the one in the next tree.

When the familiar messengers of the dawn began to show themselves, and the woods grew lighter, the snoring ceased. The little window in my aspen opened as well, but the head did not show itself. It was a cloudless morning, and it soon became light. The bird in the next tree stirred, and thus revealed itself; I could now see it perfectly. When he was fully awake he stuck his head out on his long neck, like a fist, first to one side and then to the other, and spread out his tail as in the mating display. I had heard about autumn mating from various sources, and wondered if he would call. But no, he pulled his tail in, stuck his head out, and began to peck rapidly at the leaves near him. At the same time my own bird began to tear the leaves as well, so that suddenly I saw his head with the beard in the little window.

He was shot so cleanly that from below he hardly stirred; he was only able to stick his claws more deeply in the bark of the aspen, that was all! And the leaf he let go took even longer to fall. Thinking about the snoring, I believe that the breathing of these great birds, issuing from under the wing, vibrates the feathers in some way. But I am not at all sure that the capercaillie actually does sleep with his head under his wing. I believe this is so with domestic fowls, but in spite of the guesses and fables, the life of the woods is still little known.

THE DYING LAKE

It was quiet and peaceful in the golden woods; warm, as in summer; the gossamer lay on the fields, the dry leaf rustled underfoot, the birds flew away well out of range, and the red hare threw up a cloud of dust on the road. I had left the house early, and had such a headache that I was barely able to think. All I could do was follow the dog's movements, hold the gun ready, and glance from time to time at the pointer of my compass. I wandered so far that at length the compass needle no longer pointed homewards; I found myself in a part of the country quite strange to me. I pushed my way through the thick undergrowth for some time, and suddenly in the deep dreaming golden woods I came across a dying lake. I sat there a long time, looking at this open eye of the earth.

In the evening the weather changed suddenly; it was as if a large samovar boiled up beyond the wall of the forest; this was the rain and wind unclothing the trees. That night, according to my notes and predictions, the geese should fly away.

THE FIRST SNOW OF WINTER

A quiet moonlit night, with a slight frost, and then the first snow of winter fell as the day began. The squirrels were chasing one another through the bare trees. In the distance the blackcock was crowing, and I would have liked to steal up and watch him, but I suddenly realized that this was not the bird's cry at all, but the wind carrying the sound of a cart on the distant main road.

It was a patchy day, with bright sunshine followed by clouds of flying snow. In the marshes by ten o'clock in the morning there was still a layer of ice on the pools, and white tablecloths were spread over the tree-stumps, with the red aspen leaves like crimson saucers. The jack-snipe flew out of the swamp and disappeared into the blizzard.

The geese were feeding. In the twilight I stood motionless facing the evening sun. The cry of flying geese could be heard, a

flock of teal passed over, and some kind of large duck. Each time the appearance of these birds excited me so much that I lost the train of my thought, and had some difficulty in finding it again. This thought was of how well it was all worked out—how each one of us must arrange our existence so as not to live too long, that we cannot hope to experience everything ourselves, leaving nothing unknown, consequently every one of us sees the world in his own mind as infinite.

THE SWANS AND THE GEESE

It had been a clear night, with a moon and stars, and a heavy frost. The geese were busy feeding in their usual places. Later another gaggle approached, and the two flocks joined forces and flew from the lake back to the fields, about two hundred of them. The black grouse were in the trees till midday and gabbled away. Then the sky clouded over, and it became cold and frosty.

After dinner the sun appeared again, and it was fine till the evening. We were glad our two golden birches had been saved from the general destruction. However, the wind was blowing from the north, and the lake lay black and bitter. A wedge of swans flew across. I had been told that the swans never stay long here, and that when the lake freezes over, so that only a narrow strip of clear water remains in the middle, and the carts are already taking the winter road across the ice, you can sometimes hear, through the gloom and silence, over there in the middle of the lake, a low chattering. You might think this was human beings, but it is only the swans among themselves.

In the evening I walked up the ravine and came out very close to the geese, and with my duck shot I might have committed a massacre, but after climbing the steep bank I was very tired and my heart was beginning to thud. There happened to be a stump on the edge of the ravine, so I sat down. I only had to lift my head—and there were the geese about ten yards away. I had the gun ready, and it seemed impossible for them to escape without loss. I lit a cigarette, blowing the smoke from my lips carefully with the palm of my hand. There was another ravine in

the wood, and not long afterwards a fox, like me in search of the geese, emerged from it. Before I could lift the gun the whole enormous flock of geese rose and flew out of range. It was just as well I had guessed it was the fox, and didn't push my head up too soon. He was following the tracks of the birds like a dog, and came closer and closer. I took aim, lifted my elbow, closed one eye, and whistled softly like a mouse—he looked this way—I whistled softly again—he came nearer. . . .

THE SHADOW OF MAN

MORNING moonlight, with the eastern sky covered with clouds. In spite of this the dawn appeared at length in a narrow band under the blanket of cloud, while the moon lay in a field of pale blue.

The clouds broke up so wildly and angrily that the lake appeared to be one mass of ice. The village cocks and the swans were crowing.

I am a poor musician, but it sounds to me as if the swan's note is an octave higher than the heron's—that same note that seems to herald the morning light in the marshes; while the bass voice of the geese is an octave lower still.

I cannot be certain whether it was by moonlight or the light of dawn that at last I noticed the rooks in the blue fields of the sky, but very soon the entire heavens seemed to be covered with them, both rooks and jackdaws; the rooks were manœuvring before their migration, and the jackdaws, according to their custom, were seeing them off. Where could I find out the reason why the jackdaws always see the rooks off? There was a time when I thought everything was known, and only a poor wretch like myself knew nothing; but later it became clear that the savants are often ignorant of the very simplest processes of living nature.

Knowing this, I began, as I usually do in these circumstances, to work out a theory of my own. In this matter of the jackdaws, I think the birds' mind is like the waves: in their manner of life some kind of impulse is transmitted from one species to another, like the waves started by a stone thrown into the water. So, per-

haps, with the first impulse the daws and rooks gathered together to fly away in company; but the rooks went on, while the daws thought better of it. And from that time forward they have repeated this from generation to generation: they gather together to fly away in company and then return when they have seen the rooks off.

But it may be even simpler than that; for it is only lately we have learnt that some of our crows migrate. Possibly a few jackdaws do fly away with the rooks.

There was a strong breeze that morning and it had blown down the small pine tree that I had put up in the middle of the field, so that I could observe the geese behind it. I went over and stood it up again, but at that instant the geese appeared. I hid myself behind the tree, so as to be invisible to them, but they made several circuits. Clearly the tree looked very suspicious, so they flew further off and settled near Dubrovitz. I began to stalk them from behind a large willow bush in the middle of the clearing. There was a hoar frost on the stubble, and my shadow jumped ahead of me; for a long time I didn't notice it, but at last I saw with dismay that my shadow, enormous and terrifying, reached right up to the geese themselves. The dreadful shadow of man on the white frost wavered and started a commotion among them, and suddenly the whole flock, with the crying of their two hundred voices, in which each one was as loud as a man's 'hooray' in an attack, threw itself at my willow bushes. I just managed to jump into a clear space between them and pull out the double-barrelled gun to meet their long necks.

SQUIRRELS

At first light we went out to the fir coppice after squirrels, approaching it singly from opposite sides. The sky was heavy and so low that it seemed as if it were only being held up by the firs. Many of their green crowns were quite red with the mass of their cones, and the harvest being so plentiful, it looked as if there ought to be a good number of squirrels there.

In the group of firs where I was standing and watching there were some looking as if they had been combed from top to

bottom; some were curly; some were young and full of resin; others much older and hung with the grey-green beards of the lichens. One very old tree was almost dead down below, and had these long grey-green beards hanging from every branch, but on the summit there were enough cones to fill a barn. One of the branches up there is shaking. The squirrel, however, catches sight of me, and is still. One side of the old tree under which I stand had been burnt out from below, and stood in a wide hollow, like a saucer. I poked about in the rotten leaves that had fallen into the saucer from the neighbouring birches, and found the earth underneath to be black and covered with ashes. From this, and because the lower part of the tree-trunk had been burnt, I could see how the round saucer had been produced. Last year a hunter had passed through the wood on the tracks of a marten. In all probability the marten had travelled up above, jumping from tree to tree, leaving her tracks on the snow-covered branches, where she had been gnawing at the bark. Stalking this valuable little beast had led the hunter on and on, and the twilight had found him in the forest, where he had to spend the night. Under the tree where I was now standing there had been an enormous ant-heap, possibly the largest ant community in our woods. The hunter cleared the snow away and set a light to it; the entire community was burnt out, leaving the hot ashes. The man lay down in the warm hollow, buttoned up his jacket, pulled the ashes over him, and slept, and in the morning went on with his pursuit of the marten. In the spring the saucer where the ant-heap had been would be filled with water. In the autumn the leaves of the birches near by fall into it, and the squirrels scatter the scales of the fir-cones down below, and now here I am after the squirrel.

I decided to occupy the time waiting for the squirrel by writing something in my little book about the ant-heap. Very carefully, and with a very slow movement of my hand, I took my book and my pencil out of my pocket. I wrote that this ant-heap was as great a kingdom as China in our human world. Just as I got to the word 'China', a scale of a fir-cone fell straight down on the page. I surmised that right over my head sat a squirrel with a cone. She had been quiet when I arrived, but now she was tortured with curiosity, wondering whether I was alive or just standing there like a tree, but up to now she was not at all

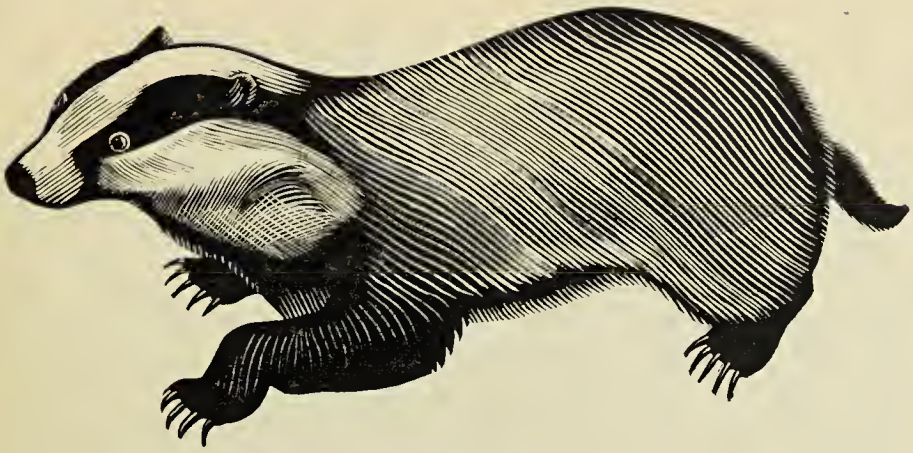
frightened. Perhaps she had dropped the scale down on purpose; she waited a little while, then dropped another and another. She was burning with curiosity, she would not move till she had found out. I went on writing about the great kingdom of the ant-heap, created with enormous, ant-like industry, and along comes a giant and, merely to spend a warm night, destroys the entire kingdom. This time the squirrel threw down the whole cone and nearly knocked my book out of my hand. In the corner of my eye I watched how she leapt cautiously from twig to twig, lower and lower, and now she was looking straight over my shoulder, the little fool, at my lines about the giant spoiling the ant's kingdom for his night's quarters.

Another time it was very similar: I shot one squirrel, and immediately a cone dropped from three neighbouring firs. It was not difficult to guess that a squirrel had been sitting in each tree when I fired, and they gave themselves away by dropping a cone. When we went out after squirrels in the 'Moscow taiga'[1] in November we used to follow them up to eleven o'clock in the morning and from two o'clock till the evening; between these hours the squirrels tear the cones from the firs, the branches sway, they gnaw at the bark, and in their search for the best morsels they jump across from tree to tree. From eleven to two we stayed at home—at that time the squirrels hide themselves in the thick branches and wash themselves with their paws.

THE BADGER

This time last year the ground was already white with snow, but this year the autumn is very late, and the white hares can be seen in the distance as they run over the black earth; there's some one to whom the late season is bad! But the grey badgers, what should they be afraid of? It seems that they are still about. How fat they are now! I decided to watch by the sett. In the pinewoods at this gloomy time you cannot at once attain that peace where our indoor estimate of dull and fine has no meaning at all, but where everything moves on inevitably and in this continuous movement takes its signific-

[1] This is a jocular reference to the woods ('taiga'—jungle) near the capital.



ance and consolation. The cliff where the badgers had made their sett was so steep in places that you often had to leave the tracks of your own paws by the side of the badger's tracks. I sat down on the bole of an old pine and watch the main entrance of the sett through the lower branches. A squirrel, collecting moss for his winter quarters, tears at the bark of a tree, and then the silence began, the silence that the sportsman can listen to for hours without being bored, sitting at the mouth of the badger's lair.

Under this heavy sky, like a weight upon the trees, there is no sign of the sun's movement, but as soon as it sets the badger knows this in the depths of his lair, and after a careful inspection comes out for his nocturnal hunting. More than once, after poking his nose out and sniffing, he will disappear for a time, and then run out suddenly with extraordinary briskness, almost before the watcher has time to blink. It is often better to wait till dawn, when he returns—for then he comes straight on and can be heard some distance away. But by this time he may be lying in his winter lair, and doesn't go out every night, and it's a nuisance to have to sit up all night for nothing and then sleep all next day.

It isn't like sitting at home in an armchair—your feet grow numb, but suddenly the badger pokes his nose out, and this is better than any armchair. He shows his snout and vanishes. Half an hour later he shows up again, stops to consider something, then disappears for good.

So he didn't come out after all. And I had barely emerged from the woods when the snow began. Had the badger, merely by pushing his nose out of the sett, foreseen this ?

THE WHITE HARE

The heavy, wet snow had been falling all night, and lay on the branches, broke, and fell. The rustling brought the white hare out of the woods; probably he imagined that in the morning the black fields would have become white, and now he himself was completely white, he would be able to lie there undisturbed. So he sat there in the field not far from the wood, and near by, also very much like a white hare, lay the sun-blanched and wind-blown skull of a horse. At dawn the field was covered, and both white hare and white skull had disappeared in the white expanse.

We were nearly too late, and when we set out with the coursers, the scent had already faded. Osman began with the fat one, but it was hard to tell the difference between the footmarks of red and white hare, and he went off after the red one. But Osman only just recaptured the scent when everything faded again on the white road, and on the black there was neither sight nor scent. We gave it up and started home through the spinney.

'Look through the binoculars,' I said to my companion. 'What is that over there showing up so white and clear on the black field?'

'The skull of a horse—the head,' he replied.

I took the glasses from his hand and saw the skull for myself.

'There's something else showing white as well,' said my companion. 'Look more to the left.'

I looked away from there, and saw the hare, a clear white, like the skull, and in the binoculars I could even pick out his little black eyes in the white head. He was in a desperate position; lying there he could be seen by everybody, yet if he ran away he would leave his footmarks in the wet snow for the dogs to follow. We decided his problem for him; we approached, and at that moment Osman, catching sight of him, threw himself after the hare with a wild bark. . . .

THE POWER OF BEAUTY

In the mist the artist Boris Ivanovitch stole up very close to the swans and began to take aim, but thinking small shot would be more effective, took down his gun, removed the cartridge and replaced it with duck shot. Just as he was about to shoot it occurred to him that he was not aiming at swans at all, but at human beings. Lowering the gun, he admired them for a long time, then very carefully and cautiously backed away, so quietly that the swans were completely unaware of their danger.

We are sometimes told that the swan is an ill-natured bird; that it cannot bear the geese or ducks near it, and often kills them. Can this be true? Yet, even if it is true, it seems to make little difference to our poetic conception of a young girl transformed into a swan; such is the power of beauty.

THE MORNING MIST

A starry and unusually warm night. An hour before dawn I went out on the porch, and all I could hear was the fall of a single drop from the roof to the ground. At first light the mist rose, and we found ourselves on the margin of a shoreless sea.

The time between first light and sunrise is the most precious and secret of all; when the only thing that can be marked is the pattern of the leafless trees: the birches had been combed out from below, the maples and the aspen from above. I saw the birth of the hoar frost, how it whitened and withered the old, yellow bents, and drew a layer of thin glass over the puddles.

At sunrise the shape of the opposite bank appeared in the clouds and hung high in the air. Then the lake itself was revealed in the rays of the sun. In the bright mist everything seemed to be magnified; the long line of duck was the front of an attacking army, while a flock of swans looked like the fabled white stone-built town rising out of the water.

A blackcock appeared, flying across from the roost, and clearly on important business, and not just at random, for from another

point a second flew over in the same direction, then another and another. . . . When I reached the spot, near the lake marshes, a large flock had gathered; one or two had settled in the trees, but the majority were running here and there between the tufts of grass, jumping and displaying just as if it were spring.

Only by the bright green of the winter corn could such a day be distinguished from one of early spring, except, perhaps, in yourself—the wine of spring no longer flowing in your veins, and your joy having lost its sharp tingling; now it is calm and peaceful, like recovering from illness; you are glad you have pulled through, but think sadly: this was not illness, it was life—life itself has passed by. . . .

During the first great snap of winter the lake was completely black, with a ring of ice, and every day the ring squeezed the black water tighter and tighter in its white embrace. Now the ring had relaxed, and the free water sparkled and was glad. From the hills came the streams, rushing down as in spring. But when the sun was concealed in the clouds, it seemed that only thanks to its rays had we seen the glad water, the long line of duck, and the city of white swans. The mist rose again and covered everything, even the lake disappeared, and the only thing left was the opposite bank with its buildings hanging somehow high in the air.

IVAN-AND-MARYA

Late autumn is sometimes exactly like early spring; here the white snow and there the black earth. The difference is that in spring the places where the snow melts give off the smell of earth, while in autumn the smell is of snow. Perhaps it is bound to be like this: during the winter we are used to the smell of snow, so in spring we catch the scent of the earth; while in summer we are used to the earthy smell, and the smell of the snow is new to us.

It rarely happens that the sun appears for more than an hour or so, but for that reason what a joy it is! Then we are satisfied by a dozen leaves left on the willow tree, already quite frozen, but so far reprieved by the storms; or by a very tiny blue flower under our feet.

I bend down to the blue flower and recognize it as Ivan; this was Ivan alone, all that was left of the familiar double flower, Ivan-and-Marya.

Strictly speaking Ivan is not a real flower at all. It is made up of tiny curled leaves, and only its colour reminds us of a violet, so we call it a flower. The real flower, with the stamens and pistil, is Marya. This must be one of the seeds fallen from Marya on the autumnal earth, so that next year the ground would be covered with Ivan-and-Maryas. The work of Marya is more difficult, that is really why she had faded quicker than Ivan.

But I was glad Ivan had survived the frosts and had even shown his blue colour. I looked at the tiny blue flower of late autumn and said quietly:

'Ivan, Ivan, where is your Marya now?'

THE HUNT

Fyodor, a professional hunter from Ramenya, came over this autumn to pay us a visit. Ramenya is no great distance from Moscow, just a few hours away, but they have some real working sportsmen there; during the winter they spend all their time hunting the fox, the hare, the squirrel and the marten. They are all paid men, and among them is this Fyodor, a shoemaker by trade. Of course he loses money by being so fond of the chase, but we all have our weaknesses.

Fyodor had been told we were very well off for foxes, and he had come over to see for himself, bringing his dogs with him—both very well known in our neighbourhood—one called Solovya and the other with almost a French name: Reston.

Solovya was a giant of a dog and a bit of a mixture: part Kostroma, part Borzoi, and part just plain house-dog; a proper mongrel, in fact, but it had resulted in a really workmanlike animal, the sort of dog to take with you shooting the fox; unless the quarry went to earth he would always bring it to bay, and instead of tearing it to pieces he would stand and bark till his master came up and finished it off. The pups of this strain were from the look of them mere house dogs, but marvellous workers: for hare, fox, marten—even badger; they would follow the

animal underground just as easily as on the surface; and to anyone who didn't know about it, all this was very remarkable, and in its way even laughable.

This Fyodor breed, in fact, was famous.

Solovya's last pup, a dog, was particularly smart, but the look of him!—take him away and chain him up in the back yard!

The Moscow sportsmen shook their heads:

'That isn't a dog!'

So they called him 'Sharik'.[1]

I adopted this name Sharik for the shaggy, red-haired mongrel, not because I despised the Fyodor pedigree, but simply because my tongue refused to call such a democratic-looking animal either Reston or Ariston.

'Ariston' was very likely a Greek jest which a gamekeeper of the old Tsarist days had played on Fyodor, the country people had corrupted it or reinvigorated it to 'Reston', and finally out came the natural explanation; not that 'Reston' was a corruption, but the normal Soviet abbreviation of *'reskiye ton'* (sharp sound)—Res-ton.

Be that as it may, On October the 7th Fyodor arrived with Solovya and this ginger Sharik. All the village sportsmen who had anything in the shape of a gun came over during the evening and asked if they could join the party. The non-sportsmen took it very seriously, and urged us:

'Mind you kill that wolf!'

The ringleader of this sporting fraternity was a neighbour of mine, the tinker Tomilin. A man on the wrong side of forty, he had a family of nine—and you can't feed a crowd like that by soldering samovars and mending leaky buckets—so he made himself handy with firearms, assembling them from all sorts of junk, and he was particularly noted for his home-made springs.

I am very fond of taking part occasionally in these village hunting-parties, but I always take great care to keep at a safe distance, for on every hunt at least one sportsman's weapon will blow up in his face. Not that this was anything to wonder at; you could see with the naked eye the cracks in the barrels stopped up with brazing metal. One gun had the hammer tied on with a length of string, and every time the owner fired it the hammer

[1] I.e., 'foundling'.

would fly up in the air, and then dangle below the barrel. But that didn't worry him very much, nor if the shot didn't reach the target—'*nichevo*' he would groan.

But what scared me more than anything were the blunderbusses, loaded up since last year; usually at the very start of the trip one of them would blow up in mid-air, and when the owner fanned the smoke away the shot would fly out like a fountain in all directions. Everybody laughs and teases him: 'Look at the sieve!'

'Give it the missus to sift the flour with!'

They could all see the funny side of it; it was very cheerful and good-humoured, and always reminded me of the days when villagers like these went out hunting the mammoth. To my mind our trips were even better; for after all the mammoth was a pretty formidable beast, and the hunt a serious business, while our quarry was nothing more than an occasional white-hare-of-the-falling-leaves, a creature about the size of a large rat—nothing serious at all, but for all that the pleasure of the hunters and the commotion they made was every bit as great. And when the sportsman with the hammer tied up with a piece of string threatens the invisible mammoth of the forest, and says:

'Look out, or I'll shoot your breeches off!'

If it had been a real mammoth, probably somebody would have said:

'You look out he doesn't kill you!'

But on our trips they merely say:

'You watch you don't get that thing of yours in your eye!'

And the excitement! Tomilin the tinker gets up at two in the morning, to see what the weather is like. I hear him stirring and put my samovar on as well.

Three o'clock.

Fyodor and I are drinking our tea. We can see Tomilin and his sons on the other side of the village street also having a cup. We talk about the hare; that there is no quarry more difficult when the leaves are falling—it lies so close.

Four o'clock in the morning.

We are still drinking tea, and arguing about the fox; how cunning the beast is. Hundreds of examples.

By five o'clock we have solved the problem of the best way to hunt the marten. The solution—comb the woods on skis; the

marten thinks to itself: 'The chap's mad'—and comes out into the open.

The dull white light of dawn shows at the window. All the sportsmen have gathered under my window and sit on the bench talking quietly among themselves.

We all get up. We are lucky; on our trip to-day there are none of those annoying folk who decide beforehand that nothing will come of it; grumble feebly at the start, and only liven up when the expedition, contrary to all expectation, turns out a success. Even the heavy dullness of the sunrise could not discourage us; none of us would have exchanged this for dawn on a spring holiday, with the nightingales singing.

Only in late autumn can it be as pleasant as this, when after the night's rain the gloom slowly lightens, the sun appears, and all the trees shed their raindrops, as if they were washing themselves. At this season of the year there is a continuous rustle in the woods, and we are all inclined to think we are being followed. But there is no need to be afraid; this is neither friend nor foe, but only the creatures of the woods seeking a place for their winter sleep.

A snake crawls along slowly and sleepily, a viper looking for a quiet spot underground. It is no concern of mine; it hardly moves or rustles the autumn leaves.

How nice everything smells!

Somebody over on the other side speaks two words. It occurred to me that this, perhaps, was only my imagination adding to the rustle of dying nature two bold human words. Or, perhaps, it was the stirring of a restless squirrel. But soon I heard it repeated, and looked towards the hunters.

They were all standing perfectly still, as if they expected the hare to dash out of the pinewood at any moment.

Where had it been? And who had spoken?

Perhaps some women had come out looking for late yellow mushrooms, and scared at the murmur of the woods, every now and again spoke cautiously to one another.

'Lie down, lie down!' I heard high above me.

Then I realized it was not the people in the wood, it was the wild geese high overhead calling to one another.

At last an enormous gaggle appeared in the gaps between the golden birches, too many to count. I measured off fifteen with a

stick, and moving it along the triangle, I reckoned there must have been over two hundred in the whole flock.

Occasionally through the dense pinewood one could hear Solovya giving tongue on a scent she found difficult to follow, since the overnight rain had penetrated the thicket.

Our sportsmen called this young plantation the 'cupboard', and they all firmly believed that the hare was now 'in the cupboard'. They said:

'He's afraid of the leaves and the raindrops falling, you won't get him out now.'

'We've got him stuck on a pin!'

'It's not the leaves or the raindrops; why he's lying so close is because his coat is turning, I saw him: his breeches are white but the rest of him's grey.'

'Never mind, even if his breeches are white, he can't get away, he's in the box, and we've got him stuck on a pin.'

The trunk of the single tall pine that overtopped the thicket was running down with resin, almost like cream, and all this 'cupboard' was covered with the fallen birch leaves, and more were falling all the time with a quiet whisper.

Yawning, and watching the plantation strewn with leaves, one hunter said:

'What a chest of drawers!'

Tomilin the tinker yawned with him. What were things coming to: yawning during a hunting trip!

Tinker Tomilin said:

'Can't we go and help Solovya?'

They ran their eyes over the 'cupboard', as if gauging their strength, whether they could charge right through or would get stuck on the way.

Suddenly they all got up and decided to go and help Solovya:

'Workers of the world, unite!'

Yelling at the top of their voices, they charged at the 'cupboard', where the sunlight, filtering down, gleamed upon the white trunks.

Tomilin the tinker, in the lead, tore straight through the middle, and the more he was pulled up, the more he yelled. They were all yelling, hissing, squealing, barking; never was human voice so loud. It was all a relic of the days when they hunted the mammoth.

A shot.

And a desperate shout:

'There he goes!'

The first and hardest part of the hunt was over: like a fuse laid under a barrel of powder; it burns for an hour or more, and at last, suddenly, the powder explodes.

'There he goes!'

And everybody had to shout joyfully and at random:

'There he goes, there he goes!'

Solovya's baying sounded confident, and every now and then we heard Sharik's voice, 'Reston', actually, very sharp, 'rez-ton'.

In a twinkling the whole crowd of young fellows, regardless of the thick undergrowth, dashed helter-skelter into the plantation to head the quarry off, and with them Tomlini the tinker, crashing through the bushes like an elk.

This was no way at all to hunt the hare, but very likely that was the last thing they were thinking about; they were having their fun tearing swiftly through the woods like greyhounds.

Fyodor and I, old sparrows at this kind of thing, glanced across at one another and smiled. We listened attentively to the chase, and knowing roughly where the hare was likely to break out, took our places; Fyodor on the other side of the clearing opposite the opening to the 'cupboard', while I stood further away where three green footpaths met between the older trees of the forest and the thick bushes.

The heavy crashing of the forty-year-old sportsman, the elk in the thicket, had only just died away when in the distance along the green footpath there was the flash of the white scut, and I saw the grey hare himself, coming, hoppity-hop, straight towards me.

I watched him over the sights of the raised gun; this mammoth was the tiniest white-hare-of-the-latest-falling-leaves; at one end of his short body were his enormous ears, and at the other his long legs, so long that as he ran his whole body first rose up into the air, then sank low to the ground.

On me lay the tremendous responsibility of not letting the hare-of-the-falling-leaves get to the 'cupboard', and thus tie up the dogs again for some time; I had to shoot this mammoth without fail. I took careful aim.

He stopped and sat down.

I never shoot at a sitting bird, but for all that his end was unescapable: if he ran on towards me, the sights were between his two front paws; if he jumped across to one side, they would move unerringly to his head.

Nothing could save this doomed mammoth.

But suddenly . . .

Not far away out of the thicket a head appeared, ginger-coloured, but somehow grey from the heavy dew.

'Sharik?'

I very nearly shot him, taking him for a fox; but this wasn't Sharik at all, it *was* a fox. . . .

All this happened in a second: the dew-drenched fox could neither move away nor hide. I fired, and the red one toppled over into the thicket, while in the distance bobbed the white scut of the grey.

And then the dogs flew up. . . .

And Fyodor. And with his gun at the ready, as if in a charge, Tomilin the tinker. Tomilin dashed out of the thicket on to the pathway, followed by the others, their guns flashing in the patch of sunshine. The dogs, held firmly on a lead, struggled to get at the fox, barking as hard as they could. The sportsmen were yelling too, each one trying to shout louder than the rest, how he had seen the fox stealing through the undergrowth. Then the dogs began to cool down, and the young fellows were silent; in their single-minded happiness they were united as one man.

ANCHAR

I LIKE coursing, but I am not overfond of chasing through the woods, hallooing, clambering through the undergrowth, and in general acting like a dog myself. My method is this: I let the dog loose, then boil myself some tea; I am in no hurry, even when it starts boiling up; I drink my tea and listen, judging which way the hunt is going, then I go to the right place to intercept—and that's that.

That's how I like it.

I had a dog like that once, called Anchar. To-day, near the Alexeyevo encampment, in the river valley which leads down to the clearing, a forest cairn stands over his grave. . . .

He was not a dog of my own breeding. One day a peasant brought a courser to me; a full-grown, well-developed dog—a sight for sore eyes.

'Stolen?'

'Yes,' he said, 'but it was a long time ago; my son-in-law stole him from the kennels when he was a pup, but that's nothing to worry about now. He's pure-bred. . . .'

'I can see that for myself,' I said, 'but what sort of a courser is he?'

'Good.'

We went out to test him.

We had hardly left the village behind and entered the woods when he sent the dog away. He was off like a shot from a gun, all that was left of him were his green footprints on the grey moss.

In the woods this peasant said to me:

'I feel a bit chilly. What about lighting a fire?'

'Is he pulling my leg?' I wondered. No, it was no joke; he gathered a few sticks, lit the fire, and sat down.

'But what about the dog?' I asked.

'You're a young man, but I am old; you've never seen anything like this before; I'm going to teach you something. Don't worry about the dog, he knows his job; his part is to find the quarry, while we have a cup of tea.'

He smiled.

We drank a cup each.

The dog was giving tongue.

I got up hurriedly.

The old peasant laughed and quietly poured himself out another cup.

'Listen,' he said. 'What's he after?'

We listened. The barking came over thickly, the chase was in short, sharp rushes.

The peasant understood.

'He's chasing a fox.'

We drank another cup each, while the dog had already covered abour four versts. Suddenly the barking stopped. The peasant pointed in a certain direction:

'Have you got some cows over there?'

Actually there were a couple of heifers.

'He's picked up the trail of the cows. Now he'll have to go back again and start afresh. Let's have another cup.'

But the fox was not allowed to rest for long; fresh tracks were found and he began to circle round in ever-narrowing curves, clearly it was a local fox. When the dog started his circling, the peasant stopped drinking tea, put out the fire, stretched his legs and said:

'Now we must get a move on.'

We went over to the clearing in front of the fox's earth to intercept the chase. We had only just arrived when there she was in the clearing, and the dog on her tail. She tried to show a clean pair of heels into the swamp, but the dog wasn't having any—tyap! straight for his neck, and the fox—'vyoo!'; it was all over. There lay the fox, and at his side the dog, licking one of his paws.

Rather stupidly they had named him Gonchar (courser), but in my excitement I shouted:

'Anchar!'[1]

And so it was later: Anchar and Anchar.

Do you know how the sportsman's heart is revealed? You know the mornings with the frost on the grass and a thin mist before sunrise, how the sun appears and the mist slowly withdraws, so that what had been cloud becomes a blue expanse between the dark-green pines and the golden birches; how it all gets bluer and more golden and more shining? So the hard October day begins, and just so the sportsman's heart is re-

[1] The upas tree.

vealed; he has tasted the frost and the sun, sneezed and wished himself 'God-speed!' and every man he meets is his friend.

'My friend,' I asked the peasant, 'what misfortune has compelled you to offer such a wonderful dog, for money, to a stranger?'

'He'll be in good hands,' said the peasant. 'As for my misfortune, it is just a peasant's bad luck. My cow ate some frozen grass, swelled up, and died; I must buy another cow. What is a peasant's life without a cow?'

'I know, and I'm very sorry for you. But what are you asking for the dog?'

'I should like a cow. You have two; give me your speckled one.'

Ah! what an autumn I had—no yelling through the woods, no scrambling in the bushes, no peering and poking here and there: but walking quietly along the footpaths, admiring from day to day the deepening gold of the trees; sometimes busy watching the hazel-hens, I stamp on the path and whistle, and they come running up the glade to meet me. Then the golden time was over: one very frosty morning the sun rose, it became quite hot, but by midday all the leaves on the trees had shrivelled up. The birds no longer answered to the decoy call. The rain came, the leaves began to rot, and the most melancholy month of all began —November.

For I have no liking to go about the forest in a gang. I like to walk slowly, with many halts to stand and stare, then all the small beasts take me for one of themselves; I like to watch all these living creatures and wonder, only killing when I must. Worst of all, to my mind, is when they go out into the forest yelling and shouting, and killing everything they set eyes on. Sometimes, however, an agreeable friend, a knowledgeable sportsman, would turn up, and I liked taking him out; it was a different kind of pleasure, but very nice in its way—an honest man is happy till death. Thus a sportsman wrote me from Moscow early in November, asking if he could go coursing with me. I was delighted to hear from him, and replied that he could. You all know this sportsman, but I shall not give you his name. On the evening of the seventh he turned up at my house.

Of course it had to happen that just before this there was a sharp fall of early snow; by the seventh it had thawed again,

making everything very muddy, and in addition there was a slight but very chilly drizzle. I lay awake all that night, fearing that things would be spoilt by the rain. Fortunately the stars shone out just before midnight, and towards morning the hares had left us some strong scent.

We got up well before dawn and drank our tea under the morning stars; chatted for a while; and when the grey-blue light shone through the window, we set out with Anchar on the track of the grey hare.

That autumn the winter corn began almost in the village itself, and the corn this year was thick and strong, a juicy green, almost eatable. The hares had been feasting on it till they were as fat as grapes. Sometimes I took a pound of fat from a single hare. Anchar found the scent at once, and circled round, and set off direct for the forme. In the woods at this time of the year there is a continuous rustling and pattering of moisture falling from the trees. This scares the hare and usually it will come out and settle down in our clearing opposite the Alexeyevo encampment. I knew what Anchar was after when he left the wood and went straight for the clearing; and then across the waste ground to the ravine: when the hare had to leave the clearing it would have to cross this valley. I posted my friend on the edge of the ravine, and went over myself to the other side; he could not see me, but from where I stood I could see him distinctly.

Such planning is necessary, of course, but only rarely does everything work according to plan. We waited and waited—still no sign of the hare, and Anchar had disappeared.

'Siryozha!'[1] I shouted. . . .

Sorry; I didn't intend to give you this sportsman's name; you all know him well; still, there are plenty of Sergeis about.

'Siryozha!' I shouted. 'Call Anchar!'

I had lent him my own hunting horn, he was quite an expert with it, and liked it. As soon as Siryozha lifted the horn I saw Anchar running up the ravine towards us. I could see at once from his manner that he was following the same tracks as before, but the hare had been chased out of its lair by a fox or an owl, and had already passed through the ravine, and Anchar was now hot on his trail. But as soon as he drew level with my friend I saw the latter raise his gun and take aim. . . .

[1] 'Siryozha', a familiar form of Sergei.

This might not have happened if I had remembered that once at this very spot I had myself taken aim at a man's head and very nearly shot him; he had been walking up the valley wearing a hare-skin hat, and this was all I could see of him; I was just about to press the trigger when his head appeared. If this had flashed through my mind, I should have realized that from above only the animal's coat could be seen, and I would have shouted to stop him. But I thought—my friend is only joking; these city sportsmen are always acting like horses put out to grass.

I thought he was only joking, but suddenly—bang!

Then silence, and the cloud of smoke settled slowly in the ravine.

I froze in horror, and then I remembered how from this very spot I had nearly shot at a man's head.

The blue smoke lay over the green valley. I waited and waited, and the seconds went like years, and no Anchar, no—Anchar didn't appear out of the cloud of smoke. When it cleared, I saw my Anchar sleeping his eternal sleep, on the green grass as on a bed.

The heavy drops of autumn rain fell from the high trees to the lower, from the low trees to the bushes, from the bushes to the grass, from the grass to earth; the sad whisper, starting in the trees, and silenced only when it reached the earth: and the earth gently absorbing all the tears. . . .

And I looked at all this with dry eyes. . . .

'Well, after all,' I thought, 'it might be worse; sometimes even men are shot by accident.'

I am a fairly even-tempered sort of fellow, and soon take control of myself; I had already begun to wonder how best to approach my friend, and show him how I sympathized with him; I realized that after all it was no better for him than for me, and that we were sportsmen, and knew how to turn sorrow into joy. In Tsiganova there was a home-brewed liquor seller in every cottage, so I decided to take him to Tsiganova and forget it all in vodka. As I was thinking like this, I looked at my friend and wondered: he came down, looked at the dead Anchar, again went to his place, and stood there just as if the hunt were still on.

What was the idea?

'Hi!' I shouted.

He shouted in reply.

'What did you shoot at?'

'At the owl.'

My heart turned over.

'Did you get it?'

He answered:

'Winged it.'

I sat on a stone and suddenly understood how the land lay.

'Siryozha!' I shouted.

'Well?'

'Blow the horn for Anchar.'

I watched him: he took the horn and stood still. Then he took one pace towards me; it was clear he was ashamed of himself; took another step and stopped to think.

'Now then!' I shouted. 'Blow!'

He picked up the horn again.

'Hurry up!' I cried.

He put the horn to his lips.

'Come on! Come on!'

He began to blow.

I sat on the stone and listened, as my friend blew the horn, and found for myself a queer diversion: I watched a crow chasing a sparrow-hawk, and wondered why he didn't strike behind the head, he only tapped once. With thoughts like these you can sit on a stone as long as you like. And in the same sense I began to think of man himself; what need is there of deceit? Death is the end, it all finishes so simply, so why blow the horn about it so loudly? There was our dog shot, and our sport was over, and he had shot the dog himself, and he knew it: I am not a hard man, and would not ask him to justify himself, nor say anything harsh to him. . . . But why didn't he own up?

'Look,' I said. 'You go along that path over there, it will take you to Tsiganova; we'll have a drink there; you go along the path and blow the horn as you go; I'll stay in the woods and listen if Anchar replies to the horn.'

'But you take the horn and blow it yourself,' he said.

'No,' I replied, 'I don't like blowing it much; the sound rings in my ears too long, and I can hear nothing; yet in the woods you have to hear the least sound.'

He was rather embarrassed and asked timidly:

'But where are you going?'

I pointed to the spot where Anchar lay.

'Now,' I thought, 'we shall get the truth.'

But no, all he said was:

'I shouldn't go that way if I were you; there are no trees over there, and he wouldn't be in the bushes.'

'All right,' I replied. 'I'll go the other way. But don't forget to blow the horn as you go.'

When I said I would go the other way he cheered up, and blew the horn so that it could be heard three versts away.

'No,' I said to myself as he went away, 'there are many marvels possible among the living, but with the dead there are no miracles; you won't call Anchar that way. Because of this a real sportsman would have looked me straight in the eye and said: come and have a drink, my friend—it's all over.'

Yes; why did he lie to me?

I always carry a small hatchet in my belt in case of need; I pulled it out of its sheath and using it like a spade, I dug a hole in the soft earth. I laid Anchar in the hole, filled it up, and raised a small cairn, and put a dogberry stake at the end. In one of my barns there was a devil's head of charred wood; in the twilight it always frightened the women, and they all called it the 'goblin'. I ran to the barn, dragged the 'goblin' out, and set up Anchar's headstone.

I stood there admiring the devil, while Siryozha still blew the horn. 'Why on earth, Siryozha, did you lie to me?'

There was a light, cold drizzle of rain. From the high trees the raindrops fell heavily to the lower saplings, from the saplings to the bushes, from the bushes to the grass, and from the grass to the damp earth. All through the forest there was a whispering: mice, mice, mice. . . . But Mother Earth took all the tears gently to her, and drank them up, still drank them up. . . .

It seemed to me as if all the roads of the world had led to one place, and at the end of all stood a forest devil over a dog's grave, and looked at me so solemnly.

'Listen!' I said, 'Listen, devil! . . .'

And I made a speech over the grave, but what I said is a secret.

After this I felt easier in my mind, and walked to Tsiganova.

'Stop blowing the horn, Siryozha,' I said. 'It's all over, and I know all about it. Why did you lie to me?'

His face was as white as a sheet.

We had some drinks together, and spent the night in Tsiganova. You all know this sportsman; we all have a Siryozha like this in our memories.

THE INVALID

EXPECTING fine weather, I left the house in a light woollen coat without lining, and wandered far into the woods, in search of the precious autumn woodcock. Gradually and almost imperceptibly the sky clouded over, and then the rain started, at first little more than a drizzle, like a thick mist, but piercingly cold, and then getting wetter and wetter. I looked round for a young fir to shelter me, and sat beneath it on the dry projecting roots, with my dog lying by my side. All round the fir there were many birches and maples; the fall of the leaves was in full swing; the raindrops beat incessantly against the broad leaves of the maple, and they fell with such a suspicious sound that every now and again the dog lifted her head inquiringly. I looked round as well as the dog, for I had heard there were bandits about in the forest. There had been a story in the newspapers not long before of two citizens from Sergeyevo who had been captured and beaten with a strap. The

rumour of bandits had travelled round the entire district, and the members of the wildfowlers' union had been warned against strangers coming up with a request for a light. When I left the house my wife implored me not to spend the night in the forest, as I sometimes did, and not to rely on the dog. That was why the dog and I watched the heavy wet leaves falling all round us, and my thoughts were busy with the chance of an unfriendly shot at a human being. I have killed plenty of all sorts of game in my time, but consider myself a happy man mainly because it has never been my lot to have to shoot at a human being.

Gradually we became accustomed to the rustle of the leaves, and the dog curled up again, putting her cold nose in the warm corner between her hind legs. I put my hand on the dog's head, leaned against the bole of the tree, and lit up. Suddenly a nervous tremor ran through the dog; I opened my eyes at once, and saw about five yards away a squirrel with a huge tuft of moss in his mouth. The squirrel was wondering whether we were alive or dead, for I, by a sportsman's habit, had only opened my eyes, while the dog had not even lifted his nose from his hinder end. It was very amusing to watch the little beast—a sportsman's life is always rich in such occurrences, and that is what attracts me to it more than anything else. At last the squirrel jumped up into the tree and watched us from a branch; we didn't follow him, so we were nothing to be afraid of. He sprang swiftly from branch to branch, arranged the moss in his nest, and came down again to the ground, probably for some more lining for his winter bed.

A fresh rustle in the bushes. This time the dog turned her head in that direction and watched for some time. The rustle was not repeated, but the idea recurred about the bandits and the possibility of having to shoot at a man. I remembered our fat deacon giving a lesson in the first class of the grammar school on the commandment: 'Thou shalt not kill.' We asked:

'What about in wartime?'

'It is possible in wartime,' agreed the deacon, 'it would be forgiven then. . . .'

But there was something wrong with the expression on his face when he said this, and that was why I remembered it so clearly after more than thirty years.

Not that I was scared of the bandits, but this accompaniment to my hunt for the woodcock, and the possibility of someone

hunting me in turn, took away my feeling of complete freedom in the woods, the main reason for hunting at all. The sweet music of the rain began to have an unfriendly sound, and the cold dampness went through my thin covering. I got up, took my bearings by compass, and set out to find a human dwelling.

Fortunately I soon came across a cultivated patch, with a woman working on it. I went up to her; she was to all appearances a dried-up old hag.

'Can I make some tea here?' I asked. 'I have my own tea and sugar, and I'll pay for the use of the samovar.'

'I'll ask the old lady,' replied the ancient, and disappeared. She soon returned, and spoke two words:

'Come in.'

This is most unusual with these country people, for they always ask the inevitable question: 'Who are you?' I could see that the old hag was completely worn out; she had even lost the desire to make inquiries, the last stage of all for an old woman. I even began to wonder: 'Perhaps they have a corpse in the house; I've dropped in just at the right time!'

I was very nearly right, for the master of the house was a living corpse. Leaning his back against a cupboard, a peasant sat on a stool in ill-fitting clothes, his pale, puffy face half-concealed by a long black beard. He had great difficulty in breathing. He made no attempt to get up. His legs were paralysed. He had been sitting there a long time, ever since the German war.

'Don't you get a pension?' I asked.

'No,' he replied, 'I live by my wits. They took my pension away owing to Stepanov.'

In wearisome detail the invalid told me how, during the war, an officer had enrolled him in error as Stepanov. He explained to the officer that his name was Shchukin, not Stepanov, but the officer replied angrily: 'As far as we are concerned you are Stepanov now.' Day after day, right to the end of the war, he took the name and place of Stepanov. When the war was over and he returned to his village he became Shchukin again, and he was refused a pension. There was no point in making a fuss about it; all they said was: 'Stepanov was killed in the war.'

'But how do you make a living?' I asked. 'Surely you do some work of some kind?'

'No, I haven't done any work for a long time,' replied the

invalid. 'I live by my wits. When folks are at work, they have no time to think, but when you are sitting still doing nothing all day long, all sorts of ideas come into your head, and sometimes I can turn them to some profit for myself.'

He went on to give examples of the useful ideas that had occurred to him. One day the agent of the journal *Moscow Village* came and suggested he subscribe to it, only fifteen copecks a month. The invalid paid the fifteen copecks, and during the month sold the paper for veneering for forty-five, a clear profit of thirty copecks. That was one case.

'If you use your head,' said the invalid, 'you can live without doing any work at all. But you have to be sure it's going to be profitable; if you don't, you often get thinking at random, and that can do a lot of harm. I always think of the profits.'

Then he gave another instance of his profitable ideas. This was in connection with the Komsomol. They asked him to look after their library for them for a rouble a month. He put their books in the cupboard, leaned his back against it, and kept them there for three months. At the end of this period he suddenly received an order to return the books at once.

'But what about the money?' asked the invalid.

'You'll get the money later. We owe you three roubles.'

'Then you get the books later. You bring the money, and then you get the books.'

Six more months went by, and they brought him three roubles.

'But you owe me nine,' said the invalid. 'I've kept the books for nine months.'

'We read the books for three months,' replied the Komsomol leader. 'You are entitled to three roubles. The other six months you kept the books for nothing.'

'The books were left here idle for six months,' answered the invalid. 'I was looking after them, though, all the time.'

'You mean you were looking after yourself.'

'Well, why not? If I don't, nobody else will. I am one of you, your own neighbour, after all, and unless I look after myself I can't make a living.'

One of the bosses came down to see him and finally the matter was referred to headquarters. While this was going on another month went by. Eventually they had to pay him ten roubles.

He gave several more examples of how it was possible to

make a living by your wits, in default of a pension: the rich live on money, while the poor have to use their wits.

'Even you,' he added, 'when you go through the forest, you are all the time thinking of ways to improve yourself.'

My case was more complicated. It appeared that many of my schemes were useless and unprofitable. But it wasn't easy to explain all this; and the invalid had expressed very definite opinions about useless ideas. So I held my peace.

'Aren't you scared sometimes, in the forest?' he asked.

'What have I to be scared of, with a dog and a gun?'

'Last year about this time a sportsman was murdered and his gun stolen.'

I had a vague recollection of reading about this in the newspapers. I asked him to refresh my memory. The invalid willingly began to relate the incident in great detail. It had caused a great scare at the time. A complete stranger approached a wildfowler in the woods, and after asking for a light for his pipe the bandit killed the sportsman, took his gun, and set off for the main road. A doctor was taking his young bride home after their wedding. They were held up by the bandit, and offered him money, a gold watch, everything they had, as long as he left them alive. But he murdered the young couple and cut the driver's throat; but he didn't take the money or the gold watch; he didn't touch a thing, and simply ran away.'

'I remember now,' I said. 'Did they catch him?'

'Yes.'

'Was he brought to trial?'

'Yes, of course; he was tried and shot. If he had done it on purpose, for his own good, it would have been another matter; but as it was, he committed murder without any motive. So they shot him.'

I began to wonder if I had heard aright, so to make sure I asked him again:

'I don't think they shot him because he had a motive for the murder, for actually he didn't take the money.'

'That's right. They shot him because he committed murder without aim or purpose.'

So I had not been mistaken.

The invalid went on:

'I got the ten roubles out of the Komsomol because I had to do

it in order to live; I had nowhere else to turn. In the same way a man might be forced to commit murder, and when they bring him to trial, and find he had his purpose or motive, then they make allowances. But if a man kills another without motive, how can they make allowances?'

Then I remembered the real story: the bandit had been a lunatic, and had never been shot. The invalid had invented all that himself, to fortify his idea of justice.

'Lunatics are put under restraint, and not shot,' I said.

'But suppose he escapes?' he replied. 'What do you mean by a lunatic? I tell you I am always thinking and thinking, finding ways to look after myself. If you didn't do that, you'd soon go off your head altogether.'

WINTER

THE DEATH RUN

More than once I have lost myself in the woods in winter, and have seen the Frost Gipsy! And until I look back in the twilight at the grey strip of forest in the distance, I am never quite at ease. Yet sometimes, early in the morning after a light frost and a fall of snow, I go into the woods well before sunrise and celebrate my birthday, and everything is so strange and lovely that you are sure no one had ever seen anything like it before.

On this occasion I hadn't much time to spend admiring the huge palaces of snow, and listening to the deep silences. My foxhound Solovya gave the signal; like Solovya-the-Bandit he howled and whistled, and at last bayed so loudly that the silence was shattered. It was always with these strange sounds he picked up the fresh tracks of the wild beast.

As he picked up the trail I hurried across the clearing with the three firs—the fox usually appeared just there; I stood still under the green awning and watched the glade. He had clearly got hold of something: he pressed on, nearer and nearer. . . .

The fox jumped out into the clearing from a private pine-

wood some distance away, all red on the white background, and very much like a dog herself, but you wonder why she has such a handsome and such an apparently useless tail. It seemed as if there were a smile on that cunning mask, the splendid tail waved, there was never a beauty like her.

Solovya followed close behind her, also, like her, red-coated, strong, and utterly mad; he chased up and down till he found the prints of the cowardly beauty in the white snow, and from that moment the soft-hearted domestic animal was transformed into the wildest, craziest, and most stubborn of beasts. Neither bugle call nor rifle fire would call him off now. He ran at full speed, howling with all his might, determined to reach his quarry or perish in the attempt. His frenzy infects his master as well, and more than once both of us only came to ourselves eight versts away in the depths of the snow-filled woods.

The two sets of footprints came from different sides of the clearing; in the thicket the dog went by scent and crossed track after track till he reached the small pinewood, where the fox had shown me her splendid tail. There was still a faint hope that this was a local animal, and that she would return and we would be able to close in on her in ever-narrowing circles. But soon the barking ran out of earshot and did not come back; she was a stranger and had gone back to her own country.

Then my chase began. I had to run hard, following the track till I could hear them again. For the most part the trails led across the hummocks of the forest clearings, the fox's in curves, with the dog's cutting the corners. I tried to go as straight as I could, and took a short cut whenever possible. My eyes saw nothing else but the tracks, and in my mind there was no other thought but that of following them: I too, like Solovya, was a maniac that day, and ready for anything.

Suddenly there appeared a broad roadway of different tracks, mostly hare, with the fox's on the hare's path. She had a double motive for this ruse; to conceal her own traces and lead Solovya astray with the fresh prints of the hare. That was what had actually happened. There was a fresh trace, and possibly under those bushes the white hare was lying, watching us with his brilliant black buttons of eyes. Solovya had hesitated. Should he leave her and follow the unhappy little hare?

Her single track left the hare's path straight for the marshes,

with a clump of willows on the margin, gnawed by the hare, cut straight across a clearing, and then . . . Hello, Solovya! His heavy footprints ran out of the wood, picked up the beast's track afresh and went into the valley for the death run.

Solovya's howl on the run made me marvel. I stopped for a second, heard nothing, and tried to think what had happened. Silence, and all the time I thought I could hear the woodcock whistling. But the tracks led out into the field, the sun made them look blue, and right across the wide field ran the blue footprints.

She had dived nimbly under the low stakes of the fence and went on; he had tried to do the same, but could not get through. He had then tried to jump over. On the top there were two patches where the snow had fallen away, knocked down by his great paws. Then I understood what had happened; I had not been mistaken, he had been howling for me when he fell off the fence, and then he had tried to get round it. Where he had gone now I couldn't see, but on the edge of the fire-break I could see the new tracks come together again and lead down to this precipitous spot.

For a hound there is no better test than this fire-break. Some time or other the peaty ground had caught fire, cutting through the enormous bear's den, and the trees had fallen down one after another and lay in tiers, and had started to grow again from the bottom. It was not only impassable for a man or a dog, but even for a fox. She had gone in there to head him off, and would not be there long. She dived under the trees and left her lair behind her, while he would tear at the snow from above and be distracted by the scent of the polecat on the logs. They fell into the deep hollow together, hidden by the powdery snow, and then she took a leap to the second layer of the fallen pines, then up to the third and ran along the branch as far as the middle, while the dog supported himself for a time, but finally dropped back into the pit. Not far away somebody could be heard cutting firewood; whoever it was had a good view of everything, how the animals rose and fell one after the other. But it was impossible for a mere human to follow this wild chase. I made a wide circle round the fire-break, fretting that I was unable to do what they did.

I failed to find any tracks emerging from the hollow. Suddenly from the direction of the private wood I heard a long,

mournful howl. I went straight towards the sound, to see if I could be any help. I was breathing heavily, and it was as hot in the snow as in an equatorial desert.

All my efforts appeared to be in vain. Solovya had put himself right, and once more went out of earshot. But I was very interested in finding out why he had been howling so long and so mournfully, and I had to know. The private forest was intersected by a main road. I realized that the fox had run out on the main road, and a sledge had come along soon after and covered up her fresh tracks. Possibly this same sledge would soon return, a painted sledge, carrying, perhaps, match-makers with their beards covered with frost; were they going for wine? Solovya had run out into the road in pursuit of the fox. But here on the main road he was not in the forest, where he knew all there was to be known, from his ancestors the wolves. Here the road had come much later, and was it possible for a man to teach forest matters as well as the wolves? This human straight line is incomprehensible, and the infinity of a straight line terrifying. He had tried to cross to the other side, from whence the match-makers had come after the wine, looking all the time for traces of his quarry. He had been running for some time in the wrong direction, and the endless line of the road had, in the end, terrified him, so he had squatted on the edge and howled, calling to me to reveal to him the secret of the road. While I had been fussing round the fire-break he had been howling for me!

Obviously he had turned and run blindly along in the other direction. On the edge of the road there remained one patch of her scribble that had not been effaced, here he had taken fresh courage. Further along she had tried to make a jump to one side, but this had not suited her, she had come back, and there was a small arc of prints in the snow. Solovya had also run round in a half-circle, but further still everything was wiped out; here the match-makers had come back after the wine and rubbed out Solovya's tracks. Perhaps the spot where she had left the road and taken to the woods again would have been hidden from me, but Solovya had fallen with all his weight into a drift just here and had struggled to get free again. Further along the clearing I could see the tracks meeting again, and hurried along, sweeping the white caps off the black tree stumps of the clearing.

They had not gone in a straight line for long—animals are not

very fond of straight lines. Once more they crossed the fallow from field to field, from square to square.

I noticed with glee that in one place she had tried to rest for a time, and had left her mark behind her.

If you were to ask me now I couldn't possibly tell you exactly, or even indicate approximately, where in the end I caught up with the final stages of this long chase, where the narrowing circles began. First there was a grove of tall pines, and then a small thicket with wide clear patches. Here the tracks criss-crossed in all directions, sometimes more than once in a single clearing. There I heard his sharpened barking; there the circling started. My tale of guesses ended; I was no longer the tracker, but made my own entry, as the third and most terrible of all, into this mindless struggle between the two wild beasts.

The snowflakes had clustered thickly on the barrel of my hammerless gun, and as I brushed them away with my fingers I realized from the sensation of burning how bitter the frost was. From behind a small fir I saw, at last, how the fox ran silently through the plantation with her mouth open in the slanting rays of the sun. The strong frost made the snow crackle, but I was not afraid of this now, she had no strength left for a straight run, soon she would have to meet me on one of her circles.

She decided to leave the clearing and run over to the small fir plantation on the edge; her tongue hung down at one side, but her eyes still had that terrified cunning look, concealed by her customary smile. My hands were quite hot in anticipation, but even if they froze entirely to the steel barrel of the gun, she could not escape her final end! But Solovya, cutting across the path, suddenly caught sight of her in the clearing and threw himself at her. She met him seated, and her sharp white teeth and her smile turned straight towards his simple and terrible jaws. Many times had he been nipped by such sharp teeth, and nursed the wound for weeks. He could not take her directly, and could only finish her off if she took to her heels again. But this was not the end. Once more she showed him a feint with a wave of her handsome tail and once more wriggled away into the fir thicket, and there it was getting dark.

He howled. A cloud of steamy breath rose from both their jaws. They were both covered with ice and frost, and the steam from their breath fell down in crystals.

It was difficult for me to struggle through the crackling snow; what a fierce frost it was, to be sure! But she was beyond all hearing now; through her smile her sharp teeth showed fiercer still. Nor could Solovya see me either; all he could do was watch her and see she did not catch him by the throat.

But I, unnoticed by either, watched from behind the fir, and now there was little space between us.

From the grove of tall pines the last rays of the winter sun slid down, lighting up their red trunks for a second, wishing all a merry Christmas, but no one said in a quiet voice:

'Peace be unto you, my dear animals.'

Then there was a sound as if Grandfather Frost himself had cracked a walnut, and this was louder than a shot in the forest.

Everything was suddenly confused, the handsome tail waved in the air, and Solovya flew away to one side. Immediately after Grandfather Frost, but in a straight line instead of a curve, came the crack of my gun.

The fox looked as if she were already dead, but I could see her ears laid back. Solovya threw himself at her once again. She nipped him in the cheek, but I put my foot on her neck and pierced the heart with my Finnish knife. She was dead, but her teeth still remained in my thigh-boots; I had to get them out with the barrel of my gun.

I am always ashamed to come to myself after a mad chase, when there is nothing to hang over my shoulder except a miserable, puny hare. But this beauty we had caught and killed was worth the hunting, and if Solovya had had his way, he would have gone on for more.

Thus it was we met the twilight in the forest.

THE HEART OF WINTER

I SETTLED down on the hilly shores of the largest lake in Central Russia, in an empty house, echoing with legends which the superstitious peasants told of the spirits guarding the treasure that was supposed to be hidden in the surrounding hills. I had reckoned to stay there for the summer only, but it turned out quite otherwise; a geographical expedition came

down to study the lake, queer fellows they were, all of them, and I was induced to stay the whole year round.

Geographers, as I have already remarked, are queer folks, on any showing; not like ourselves, living our lives as if the earth were flat and motionless; they live on the earth as if it were a ship speeding round the sun, and to them, of course, life seems very different. . . .

All the young people in this expedition were strange; only their leader, a middle-aged, greying professor, a vigorous, tireless person, seemed quite unlike the usual geographer: a cheerful, normal sort of chap. He and I came to an agreement to set up a geographical station there, and I consented to assume the role of observer and director. Just before the students left they dragged a great pile of geographical instruments and apparatus into my room, and the professor promised to come back in a week's time with the documents authorizing my new appointment, and to give me full instructions on the observations required, and hints on how to use the apparatus. That was in July, and now it was winter, and still the professor had not put in an appearance. The apparatus lay in one corner of my room, idle and collecting the dust. This professor seemed, after all, very much like all the other geographers, a queer fellow. . . .

While I waited for his return I began to make various observations after my own fashion. It occurred to me that as long as my interest in geography was concerned with training myself to think of life in terms of movement, it wouldn't matter very much whether I made my observations in a strictly scientific manner, or just set down my own impressions as they occurred to me, of the daily changes in the appearance of the sun, the moon, the lake, the landscape generally, and the life of man living close to nature. Even observations of this character would inevitably vary from day to day, and I would be continually noting new stages in the movement of our planet. I started to work out a method of my own, making accurate and vivid notes of the main features of the passing days. For some weeks I faltered and struggled with my material, as always happens at the onset of a new task, but gradually I got into the groove, and soon I began to feel myself on a voyage, with my ship the planet Earth.

I chose for the most part to make my notes on various trifles, just as they occurred to me; to-day these were the merest scraps,

but to-morrow these scraps, added to other and newer trifles, would build themselves up into a picture of the movement of the planet. Yesterday the ant-hill teemed with life—to-day the inhabitants had retired into the interior of their kingdom, and we could sit down on the ant-hill in the woods as in an American rocking-chair. Yesterday we were driving in the sledge along the edge of the lake, and we could hear across the unfrozen shore the colloquy of the swans; in the empty, wintry silence they sounded very serious and responsible, they were evidently discussing some very important business between themselves. To-day the swans flew away, and we were able to guess the subject of their conference—they had been discussing their migration. I noted down thousands of touching details such as these, concerning the voyage of our spinning planet in space—how the black water of the lake, full of needles of ice, broke noisily into icy patterns; how on a sunny day the ice-floes sparkled, and the few remaining gulls were deceived, taking them for fish; how on one occasion in the middle of the night the noise of the lake was stilled, and all that could be heard was the hum of the telephone wires over the lifeless valley, where yesterday there had been such varied, complicated movement.

I had no more regrets about having to spend the winter there, and grumbled no longer at the geographer for not showing me how to use his instruments. Not every one of us can get hold of expensive apparatus such as this, but what I did every one of us can do; I was clearing the path for hundreds of people scattered over the length and breadth of our immense land, on the steppes, in the deserts, and in the forest, brought up on the notion of a flat and motionless earth, with its narrow and monotonous horizon. . . . Only ten minutes a day, devoted to the main features of that day, and in a few months you can construct a new picture of the movement of life, and a unique picture, for life never repeats itself; each year our voyage round the sun takes a different route.

Sometimes in the hour before dawn it would begin to freeze hard, and the direction and strength of the wind would begin to show themselves, so that if you wished to know what sort of a day it would be, you would have to venture out of doors and make a note of the weather before the sun rose. From my quarters to the top of the steep cliffs above the lake it was a mere

twenty yards. There I stood, noting how the slender twigs of the aspen follow one another across the disc of the moon, first one, then another, then a third; this aspen seemed like the fleece of the earth, in which I was hidden, and the twigs the single strands of wool, passing across the disc of the moon, revealing the movement of the planet—a favourite test of mine, and possibly unique, in that it enables you to see this movement with the naked eye. . . . It was easy to stand on this high ridge in the empty hour before dawn, and forget the false ideas of childhood regarding the flat, motionless earth, and feel yourself a passenger on an enormous vessel, standing at a point denoted by a meridian and a parallel. Yes, I was that passenger now, but in ages to come my own soul, transferred to another, would be carried through thousands of lives by this same ship from the dying sun to some other, warmer source of light. . . .

A strong breeze blew across the cliffs, shaking the aspen and spoiling my observation of the movement. But it was all the same to me whether I could see it or not; the earth would still whirl on in space. The wind freshened. The trees began to strike against one another with their frozen branches. Every ten minutes till sunrise the temperature fell half a degree, and soon it became impossible for the captain of the earth to stand on the bridge. Fifteen degrees below and a strong wind. Then the sun rose with a flash of crimson swords.

Five minutes of this, and I went back to the house to put the samovar on, and when I returned there were no more swords, the sun was hidden, and a blizzard tore across the lake, revealing in places the black ice-floes. Before the nocturnal tracks of the animals were wiped out, I hurried across on my snowshoes to make sure of the wolf, taking care of my hunting dog, and very soon I found the well-known footprints in the thicket, together with those of a fox; both had visited the grave of my old dog and had mauled the half-gnawed bones. I guessed the wolf must be an old-stager, for these always hold aloof from the pack. That is one of their customs; when they grow old their teeth decay and they cannot keep their end up with the youngsters, so they have to work alone. A wolf like this will occupy himself mainly with dogs, and for that reason the sportsmen always call them dog-wolves. This confounded dog-wolf always caused me to tremble when my own dog Solovya chased a fox and went out of earshot.

Studying his tracks, I said: 'You just wait a bit, my beauty, and I'll catch up with you, and you'll taste my powder!' The tracks led from the cranberry bushes in the ravine down to the open field, and there they were so clear they stood out in little knobs that could be seen some distance away, with the toes and claws so precisely picked out that they looked like plaster casts. I followed the swollen footprints for some distance, but the capricious blizzard suddenly seemed to object to my prying into the animal's secrets, and wiped them out completely.

On the way back I remembered the track of the fox, and decided to try my luck at finding him; in a blizzard like this she would be very likely to seek refuge in the valley. I went round in circles, picking out the incoming and outgoing tracks, and could not tell till the very last moment, when I got back to the beginning of my circle, whether she was there or not. Finally, between me and the first tracks stood a thick clump of junipers, and here my pulse quickened. I rounded the bushes, there were no emerging tracks, the circle was complete, and I was in possession of the secret of the place belonging to my house, that in this small compass slept the voracious enemy of my woodcock and partridges.

Now it is all over and done with, the story of her nightly raids is clear. Last night in the gathering dusk she had come after my blackcock, which I had refrained from shooting during the summer so that I could hear their drumming from my front porch. All told there were six of them left, two grey hens and four cocks, with their red crests and lyre-like tails. The snow was already high enough for them to reach the lower branches of the juniper bushes, and they wandered round all day long, leaving their footprints in the snow in long chains. Towards evening they had dug themselves in beneath the snow, each one making a separate cubby-hole for himself with a little opening at the top for breathing. In the evening the fox had probably picked up their tracks and approached their sleeping quarters, pulling out one of the cocks. There was a heap of feathers on the snow, and traces of blood not far away. The fox had eaten her fill, and curled herself up like a pancake on a flat, table-like hummock of moss under the snow, as if under a tablecloth. She was satisfied and replete, and apparently had not emerged for her

early-morning prowl, or most likely the blizzard had prevented her.

There she lay fast asleep, unaware that she was already the subject of a conference between me and a couple of sportsmen, who argued in whispers, and finally decided to take advantage of the strong wind and add a few trimmings to the capture. Each one went home and fetched a reel of cord, which they tied to the bushes, marking it here and there with red flags, making a magic circle all round, and went away again to celebrate—the fox had been beflagged, and that meant it was as good as captured.

If necessary she could be held there for three or more days, simply because, although she was too fly by half in her own animal fashion, she lacked the slightest trace of human, lynx-like, or even bear-like common-sense, to despise the hunters' ruse and break through the circle. But whatever can be said about the fox—there are plenty of humans like that around, with their shifty eyes. . . .

Just in front of a small but very thick clump of firs, behind which it would be easy to conceal themselves, the hunters took down a length of cord with the flags attached, and thus left a narrow exit path. One man with his gun at the ready stood behind the clump; he was using the patent Elia cartridges, which never misfired, and in each cartridge were twenty-four bullets, dipped in paraffin to keep them from scattering. The other sportsman went round the circle to the opposite side, stepping with great care and looking for tracks where the quarry might have escaped; his footsteps occasionally making a faint whistle in the snow, or snapping a frozen twig.

The fox was still asleep, still unaware that all round her as she lay hung the closed ring of flags with the single exit through the fateful gate. But her hearing was acute even in sleep. Something whistled faintly. She raised her head. A twig snapped. She got up. She listened hard, and came out cautiously, further and further . . .

'Stop! Flags!'

She retraced her steps, she was afraid. . . .

'Stop! Flags!'

She squatted down again. This time a twig snapped very close. She leapt out, straight for the fateful gate. . . .

Stop! It was inescapable; it was more likely that one hand of a watch would catch up to the other than that the black spot waver from the red flank. . . .

* * * * *

Sometimes a hunt goes by rule and sometimes by hazard. Most of the time I hunt by the rules, and live by hazard; I have never been able to arrange everything just so; I am always losing time and energy over trifles, life is too short. . . . It seems hardly possible for a sensible man to be so careless about things that, in the very heart of winter, he has no store of firewood; and has dug right down to the bottom of his purse and left himself a bare sixty copecks. But I had been living by hazard far longer than this year, and knew by this time how to meet these chances when they came: the only thing to do is to keep a cheerful countenance. . . . I know it is not too easy to remain cheerful when the iron enters your soul, but what can you do when you cannot live by rule? I had burnt my last truss of firewood, yet I went out hunting and returned with a fox. I had been noticed carrying her, and the rumour flew round to the *cat's-home*, and before I could get the skin off her back someone appeared and gave me enough money for her to buy two and a half *sajhen* of the best birch firewood. Forthwith I asked my sporting companion Uncle Mick to get me immediately and as soon as possible some nice dry firewood.

All that night the storm had blustered, and nearly blew the house down. An hour before dawn I went out to make my observations, but came back faster than I went out; there was nothing to observe, everything just hummed and whistled and blew up and down, and in no time at all you were frozen to the marrow of your bones. Yet at this very time, in all likelihood, Uncle Mick, after a substantial meal, and wrapping himself up well, was going out into the woods for my firewood. Such a lucky chance as getting two and a half *sajhen* of wood with a single shot would never happen to him; he was no dissolute rake, he lived by the rules, and cut all his fuel in the summer. In fact he sold it to keep the wolf from the door, but realized that his job was a big one and important to others, and if he had something to eat, he knew others had some as well. . . . He sold all his dried and cut firewood, but only used green wood himself, so his cottage was

always cold. The only warm place there was on the stove, yet there was only room for the missus and kiddies up there. So Uncle Mick slept in the stove. But here and now I refuse to accept this life in the stove, according to the rules, and live, as far as possible without offending others, by hazard.

At dawn the snow became still softer, if you as much as sneezed your snowshoes sank to a depth of three feet. I looked at my house from outside and marvelled: this was no house, but some kind of Nansenian *Fram* in the Polar regions, embedded in the snow and locked in the ice, and all round the white, curling, and shifting ocean, with no human dwelling nor even trace of man in sight, even the tracks of the wild animals were completely wiped away. Naturally, the old lady wouldn't bring the milk up from the village to-day. And Uncle Mick, most likely, would soon take pity on his nag, and later, on himself. What should I do? I could wrap myself up well, put my belt on, take my hatchet, and go out and get myself some green firewood in the forest. Between the junipers the snow had drifted into fantastic, dune-like heaps; I sank in one up to my neck; in my struggles I hurt my arm. As I was floundering in the drift, suddenly everything went white, from earth to sky. I had an idea a hunter in white threw down his line to me. I was helpless, and wondered what he was making all the fuss about—here you are, get hold of it! . . . There is a point in nature when they throw up their hands and, drowning, feel that it is easier to drown than to live, and, freezing, it is far more pleasant to freeze. Why distress yourself, it will have to come, this year or next, and you can't help plunging through the fateful gate; what use is it to hurl yourself against the flags?

In a blizzard everything seems extraordinarily magnified. The bushes looked like the wall of a tall forest, and suddenly an animal leapt out half the height of the trees, with ears a yard long. The beast flew straight at me and in such a furious manner that I lifted my hatchet to defend myself, but to the hare I probably appeared still more terrifying than he did to me, he dodged to one side at once. Soon after his pursuer appeared, like a tall tower, and Uncle Mick, in his ordinary voice, said to me in reference to the hare:

'If I had a stick in my hand, I would have killed that one-eyed devil.'

Actually he had killed more hares with a stick than with a gun.

'Hello! What about my firewood, Uncle Mick?'

'I've tipped it out.'

He had been unable to get it right up to the house, and had unloaded it in the field not far away. We made several trips there and back with our small sledge, and filled the stove right up.

The smoke poured from every chimney of my *Fram*, but was soon lost to sight, like the smoke of a cigarette, in the white haze which rose from earth to heaven.

When the room was more or less warmed up I sat down and continued my observations of the winter: that the white splendour which up to now we had all called winter was nothing more than a preliminary, it was only now that we were entering the real heart of winter. And this, the heart of winter, set me wondering; it was as if the Great Hunter had caught us and left each one of us but one way of escape.

What are we to do now?

Instead of our former warmth and loving-kindness we feel rising within us a determined resolution, as cold as winter.

The fire begins to burn up well.

I thought: 'Once upon a time one of our ancestors took the branch of a tree struck by lightning, and made fire for all, and that problem was solved. . . . And here too, in all likelihood, there is some simple answer, and one day our problems will all be solved and we shall suddenly find a way out of the impasse.'

THE WINTER SOLSTICE

However many pure white flakes fell from the sky that snowy winter, there were at least as many curses from the mouths of the peasants, carting building timber from the depths of the Pereslavl-Zalesskoi forest to the station at Berendeyevo. And the more the snow fell, the more they swore, because whenever they met along the roads one or other of them had to drive his horses up to their necks in the drifts at the side.

When I was in a good frame of mind I took no notice whatever of the carters' abuse, but went on with my measurements of the

depth of the snow, the thickness of the ice on the lake, making notes of each new happening in the life of nature, and it seemed as if I were making a voyage round the sun in my ship, the Earth. Every day I noticed something fresh and characteristic, and taught myself to realize the continual progress of the seasons, which, in their passing, never come back again in precisely the same form.

But if some disturbance occurred in the cabin of my ship, or if I happened not to be feeling as well as usual, and unable to admire the soft flakes falling from the sky, then I heard nothing else but the peasants' curses, and as they grew stronger and louder, saw that they also meant that the snow was deepening; that is to say, I was still noting the continuous motion of the planet: it made no difference whether you looked up or down, in the sky or on the earth—we were still moving. . . .

We were all brought up to think of life as being motionless and on the level, in our ordinary round we are quite oblivious of the dizzy flight of our planet. We ignore all the geography we ever learnt at school, as having no practical value in our daily life. This thought was present with me the whole time, and it seemed to me sometimes that my task of noting and summing up the characteristics of this movement of the planet, if I could only succeed in revealing it to the consciousness of those brought up to think of it on the level, to be well worth while. My voyage on the Earth could be called 'The Circling Year'.

The teacher in the village which had adopted the station[1] sent a boy along with *Izvestia*.

I said to the lad:

'What's the name of the holiday to-morrow?'

'The Festival of the Soviets,' answered the urchin.

'It's Christmas,' I said, 'the Christian festival. What's the Soviets got to do with it?'

'But . . .'

'What do you mean—"but"! Will they keep the festival in your village?'

'No; they don't want our people to keep Christmas, and we . . .'

'You little chump, who are "they"?'

[1] This notion of patronage ('patshefniye') is a common one in the U.S.S.R., and applies to schools, scientific institutions, etc.

I spoke to him about the movement of the earth round the sun, and to-morrow's great festival of the Turning of the Sun, which meant the lengthening of the day and, perhaps, the increase of wisdom. He had, it appeared, heard of all this at school and was not particularly interested in geography out of hours; as far as he was concerned, the earth could go on flying round the sun, and the days lengthen, in any case they would have a good time in the old manner.

'He's right!' I decided. 'Geography should be made more cheerful, and then we shall succeed.'

After this talk I made a note that in future I must describe our journey round the sun in a cheerful manner.

There was a blizzard that night. I went out once or twice into the yard—it was blowing furiously. It seemed that to-morrow's wolf-hunt would be out of the question. But it so happened that a pair of old wolves had been hiding near the shore of the lake. Somebody had spotted them and they had fled across the lake, where they sat wondering where to go next. The giant Fedya, the leader of our local wolf-patrol, and his chief assistant, Dmitri Nikolayitch the government cashier, kept watch on them from the shelter of the bushes, and when they tried to get away in the wrong direction they headed them off into our wood. The beasts were well fed and not inclined to run very far, and they finally came to rest not far from the village, behind the cow-byres.

I had been out once or twice before with Fedya, tracking the wolves through the deep snow. Hurrying after his giant strides, you stumble and flounder about, taking a mouthful of snow now and then, like a dog; and before very long you are in a bath of perspiration, while the giant still plods on, thrusting forward on his skis and cursing you for a faintheart. I had enough of this and in future joined the party as one of the guns.

There seemed no chance of any sport at all that day; but soon they sent somebody along for me:

'The wolves are flagged!'

That meant that the wolves' hiding-place had been hung round with flags, and the beasts lay within the fatal circle, waiting for the shooting to begin. When the sportsman hears the news: 'The wolves are flagged!' he drops everything and hurries out, because the winter day is so short. There were no

horses to be had anywhere; they were all out carting timber, so a lad came for me with a young colt and a small sledge. But we drove along pretty quickly with the young colt, till we met a cartload of timber, and had to plunge into the drifts at the side of the road to let them pass; this cost us several versts. Then we met another; and the same story repeated itself. In the meantime the light was rapidly fading. This is one of the biggest hindrances to the fight with the wolves, the shortness of the days; for this reason a beat will often result in failure. But we got to the village while it was still light, and from there we only had about a verst to traverse to the marsh, with no likelihood of meeting any timber-loads on this stage.

But when we arrived at the village the owner of our colt hailed us:

'Here, off you get!'

'What?'

'You only hired the colt as far as the village!'

This is happening continually in the struggle against 'the grey squires'; in winter, when the cattle are all safe in the yard, the peasants do their best to put a spoke in the sportsman's wheel; but in the summer, when the wolves are attacking the flocks daily, and it is next to impossible to do anything, they are yelling their heads off for our help. However, we are used to this and cheerfully pay the extra two or three roubles he wanted for his colt. After the wolf had been killed Fedya would see to it that he would get paid again—with a few good blows with the skis on his behind, with the others standing round and urging him on: 'Go it, Fedya! Pile it on! Give the beggar what he deserves!'

After a few minutes' parley we free ourselves from the peasant and ride on without hindrance. Somebody was waiting for us at the fork of the road and waved his arm for us to stop. We halted the sledge, got out, and he whispered:

'Hurry up, hurry up; they're waiting for you!'

From now on smoking was of course prohibited. To stop an attack of coughing, which always starts when you leave off smoking, we put a lump of sugar in our mouth. In other and wealthier patrols they have fines for coughing, but this wouldn't have done for us. In any case we were afraid to cough, as this meant a clout from Fedya; our fines were more or less automatic.

In our haste we had forgotten to bring our snowshoes, and hurrying through the deep snow we were out of breath in a few minutes, and our hearts hammering so loud you could hear it echoing through the woods, and the bells were ringing in your ears.

My young companion, seeing the flags, began to run, and it was difficult not to get excited by these secret preparations. Besides, Fedya's flags were unusual; square and well cut, and of different colours, they hung round like so many lanterns.

We went along the line of flags for about a verst, crossed the wolves' entering tracks, and finally reached 'the silent one'. It was his business to keep his mouth shut and listen for 'the crier'; and if the wolves did rush out, and sometimes, when they are really scared, they jump right over the flags, to send for the guns. Sometimes the 'silent one' gets just as much fun out of it as one of the guns; he gives the signal, and immediately the shot rings out.

The flags ended. We had reached the fatal gates, through which the wolves must inevitably come. There at the opening the government cashier Dmitri Nikolayevitch had dug himself a hole in the snow, and laid a few pine logs over it, and all that could be seen of him behind his fortifications was his cap, tied on with a white handkerchief. About a hundred paces further down Fedya had a similar station. The giant came out and took down one or two flags for us as well, pulled a saw out of a leather case and in a few seconds he had built an ambuscade for each of us out of some pine logs. I believe this saw must have been of his own making, for it worked without a sound, and he made his snowshoes himself, smearing them with a patent medicament to prevent the snow from sticking during a thaw. He was a Jack-of-all-trades, and it was said that in former years he had built a shop with his own hands and stocked it with Muir and Merrilees' goods, but gave his sportsmen friends so much stuff on credit that he was soon bankrupt.

The wolves had been properly bottled up, but the beaters had no 'stickleback', that is, they had no leader. As a rule Fedya himself acted as 'stickleback', but as he had not expected us to arrive in time, he stayed behind as one of the guns. He soon realized they were making a mess of their beating, and his hands were itching to get at them. On my left stood my young companion,

and I rather sympathized with him. Shooting snipe alone is easy enough, but it is a very different matter to shoot at wolves in public. Sometimes a wolf will approach within sixty paces, and you have a ninety per cent chance of getting him, but he may be going in such a direction that if you hold your fire he comes within ten paces of your neighbour; you must learn to control yourself and hold everything. Sometimes one wolf will come out with another right at his heels; you have to let the first one go and shoot the second, and when the first wolf hesitates, get him as well. But an inexperienced hunter shoots at the first, and afterwards never sees the second again. This happens quite frequently.

In front of me stood a hayrick, and to the left a young pine, with my young companion standing at the side of it. The wolf came loping out on the far side of the tree and stood still for a moment as if blinded by the white glare of the snow, his hind legs deep in a drift, but his fore-paws resting on the hard crust. He looked a queer colour against the snow, not grey, but . . . Suddenly he fell deep into the snow, struggled to free himself; another shot rang out, and he disappeared completely in the drift, and I was left with the problem of deciding what colour he had been when alive against the snowy background.

The wolf had been killed so neatly that it had taken no snow at all; but lay as if alive with his muzzle on his front paws, and ears cocked forward.

'Clean as a whistle,' said Fedya; 'a very fine shot indeed; but why did you fire the second time?'

My young companion said nothing, but the reason was clear enough; in our patrol there was also a fine for a wolf that escapes, so it was always better to make quite sure and take a second shot.

The wolf was an indefinite colour, grey with a sort of yellow tinge, but this was not at all the colour I had noticed when it stood so proudly alive in the snow. I asked my companion what he had thought of it as it stood against the haystack:

'Green,' replied the youth.

Two young fellows pulled the stake out of the rick and lashed the wolf's legs together and carried it away like the pictures of big-game hunting in Central Africa. When we got to the sledge Fedya sat the wolf up in front, so that if he met anybody on the

road the horses would shy and plunge into the drifts, thus clearing the road for the conquerors of 'the grey squires'.

My house stood on a hill above the lake, and below it along the shore ran the road along which there was a continual procession of sledges loaded with timber. That night, after the New Year holiday, an empty sledge was returning from the station—there had been a rumour that the timber offices were not accepting any more loads for three days, owing to the holiday, but the railway people went on working without a break, so they were trying to get as many loads through as they could before the village timber office closed.

An empty sledge was going back for more timber. It was a new moon, and very dark. After the wolf-hunt I had managed to get hold of a good horse, and starting off well before the others, I went home and began to get something ready for them when they arrived. The shouting and cursing which reached my ears through the window as the sledges met along the road below reminded me that I had not taken my usual measurements of the depth of the snow that day, so I decided to estimate it by the sound of the cursing. In any case, it was all the same to me, as long as I could somehow mark the daily movement of the planet and plot its magical trajectory the whole year round. Better still, in fact, if I could describe this movement in terms of life, instead of in figures; figures are all very well for use in observatories, but meanwhile we outsiders remain in ignorance of them, and live our lives on the flat, unrevolving earth. What are the figures on a graduated jar to people like us! We are far more likely to appreciate a figure for the depth of the snow based on the amount of bad language on the roads.

'Besides, there are such things as aerosleighs,' I thought.

But as soon as the idea of aerosleighs crossed my mind I heard such a tornado of swearing and shouting down below that I realized at once that there was more in it than a mere thickening of the snow. It even crossed my mind that the wolves had come out to attack the village. Not long since a pack had been bold enough to rush out of the ditch at the side of the road and had actually seized a dog riding on one of the sledges. I picked up a gun and rushed out into the yard. When I got used to the darkness I could just make out what looked like some kind of giant, fighting it out with a few local peasants, and to all appearance

giving as good as he got. But the locals were soon reinforced by a group from the next convoy, and it looked as if the giant's number was up. In fact I lost sight of him for a time, but he soon reappeared with a snowshoe in his hand and set about them to such good purpose that they had to withdraw. At this point they all realized they had been fighting the leader of our wolf patrol. What had happened was that the first horse of the convoy, seeing the wolf's head propped up in front of the sleigh, had shied and plunged into the snowdrifts, while the driver, not knowing what all the fuss was about, jumped out and started a brawl. Fedya set about him, and then the others came to his assistance . . . and the row began.

The net result of all this was that on this day of the Turning of the Sun more than one of them had his nose put out of joint.

THE FATHER-WOLVES

At the edge of the fields, with its ears wide open, stands the virgin forest. The fields watch, while the forest listens. At the other end of the fields the village of Ponikovka, like an old woman, sits and muses, and everything that appears in the fields, and everything that is heard in the forest, and causes wonder, she picks up and puts in her little bag.

And many bagfuls of all sorts of odds and ends, both of forest and field, has the old woman gathered in her time. Many and many a time had we listened with fascination to Spiridonovna's story of the terrible night she spent with the wolves, and wondered at their strange custom of leaving their wolfish tokens. But to my mind the greatest wonder of both forest and field was Spiridonovna herself.

At the time she was living with us in Ponikovka. She was the district nurse; that is, she went from house to house where a child happened to be ill and stayed there during the illness.

Whenever one of the poorer people's children fell sick, the old lady appeared on the threshold and asked:

'Has your little darling passed on yet?'

Then the mother would be able to go back to her work, for her child was in safe hands; it would have been difficult to find a mother as tender and attentive as district nurse Spiridonovna.

This happened to us on one occasion; Petyushka fell ill, and we were at our wits' end; while my wife sat at the child's bedside I tried to deal with everything: fetching wood and water, doing all the shopping before going to the office, and so on; but it couldn't be done. Then they started to grumble at the office. What could we do?

One morning I got out of bed to answer a knock on the door. When I opened it in walked Spiridonovna and asked:

'Has your little darling passed on yet?'

At once our hands were free, and when a month later Petyushka began to get better, and the story went round that another child in Ponikovka had fallen ill, Spiridonovna got ready to say good-bye to him. She parted with Petyushka like a mother saying farewell to her only son going to the wars; and Oh dear me! the tears, and kisses, and still more tears! And very soon she

would be parting with another child just as affectingly as she did with Petyushka. That was why she was such a good district nurse; her mother-love was inexhaustible, but instead of being, like another woman's, confined to one or two of her own children, Spiridonovna's could be transferred to an endless succession; as soon as one child got better and able to fend for himself, she said good-bye and went to look after another. She was a treasure, and I learned much from her during the month she stayed with us, for she had an unlimited fund of tales of one sort and another.

* * * * *

It was New Year's Eve, and on the other side of the forest an old man lay dying. There was no one else in the cottage with him except an orphan grandchild. As soon as the child missed the old man's care it began to wail, then it became silent and feverish. After late mass Spiridonovna was told: an old man and a child are dying on the other side of the forest. It was the custom after mass to pay a visit to the cemetery, and Spiridonovna was among those who took their offerings to the departed. The cemetery was very small and crowded; tomb to tomb and grave to grave and stone upon stone. They could only tell their own graves by the pine fences round them, and they were often all jumbled up together, there was so little room. Actually the cemetery should have been moved elsewhere long ago, but they were used to having the funerals there, and it was high ground, and a dry, sandy soil; the dear ones were comfortable, and the living could come and pay their respects, and everybody was satisfied. In the morning the women baked their little pies, the holy father came along and burnt incense; then the sacristan came and collected the offerings in his little bag; and the sacristan's little pig came along to see what he could find, and after the little pig came a young, sharp-jawed wolf.

Spiridonovna the district nurse was not a local woman, there were none of her relations there, but she dropped a tear on those graves where the grief was fresh and sincere, and when the others went away she stayed behind to see that her offerings didn't find their way into the sacristan's bag. She crumbled her little cakes over every tomb, and soon the little birds were flying down after the crumbs. It was a pretty sight to see them flying down between the snow-covered pines, in the rays of the bright

sun. Spiridonovna's heart was bright as well; our district nurse was always of a happy and cheerful disposition.

But the young wolf following the sacristan's pig crept cautiously along the ditch, and very nearly stumbled on the old lady; seeing her, he was frightened out of his wits and ran off across the fields towards the forest. The fresh tracks across the snow were seen by a party of sportsmen, who set off on their snowshoes to chase him; but suddenly the sky darkened and the snow began to fall, and the wind wiped away the animal's foot-prints. But in the depth of the forest, where no wind could reach them, the tokens left by the wolves on the tree-stumps and bushes remained. Interpreting these signs after their own fashion, they added fresh tokens of their own, and thus kept in touch with one another and with the life of man, as far as it concerned their own. So the young grey wolf, after chasing the sacristan's pig, told his story on the tree-stumps.

As the sky darkened, so the heart of Spiridonovna darkened with it. She felt sure that without her the child would die. She went to the window of the house where she was staying at the time, and looked out to see if there were any signs of the storm abating. Towards evening it began to clear a little, but here was another difficulty: she would be making a long journey at night through the virgin forest, and at this time of the year the wolves would be out in packs. As she stood there wondering what to do, her neighbour came in with a child in her arms. Spiridonovna said to the child:

'Look out of the window, darling, and tell me what I ought to do.'

She believed, as many believed in olden times, that an innocent child could never be wrong.

'I shan't lose my way, or get frozen up, or come to any harm with the wolves?'

The child replied:

'The wolves won't harm you, granny.'

So Spiridonovna decided to set out on her journey. Her neighbour gave the order to harness the bay horse, while the young wolf guarding it ran off into the forest, leaving his tokens on the tree-trunks and bushes, and spreading the news that Spiridonovna was getting ready to travel through the forest behind the bay horse.

The snowstorm blinded the eyes of the watching fields, and stopped up the ears of the listening woods, but the wolves knew after their own manner that the storm would drop before the night was out, and that very likely there would be a moon. The pack leader, an old vixen, resolved once more to test the strength and skill of her thick-headed mate, and left her tokens in the forest, calling a grand assembly. Sniffing these signs carefully and thoughtfully, the wolves prowled silently through the loose snow to the clearing at the edge of the forest, and gathered there behind their leader.

They had not been mistaken in expecting a clear night for their meeting; suddenly the moon appeared and showed up the black mill in the field. It stood out clean and clear against the white snow, while the wormwood in the hedges, silent and motionless, watched them like peasants in the field.

The forest stood and listened, and in distant Ponikovka a puppy yapped at the moon. And what to the wolves' glowing eyes looked like a small boat skimmed over the silver-white waves; a low rustic sleigh, now riding high, now hidden, then appearing again, and hurrying, hurrying towards the black island—towards the mill. It passed the mill, and mounted higher still. The old, thick-skulled wolf, bringing up the end of the pack, nosed his way to the front, the vixen standing aside for him, and stood there ready to spring.

As for Spiridonovna, she had drowsed off, and felt as if she had already reached her destination, and was sitting on the stove with the child in her arms.

She had no need of the wolves' signposts to show her the road. She had seen and done a good many things in her time, and kept on her way, while the bay horse ran on and on. If you cannot see the road yourself, it is always best to trust your horse; they know by instinct where the firm places are, but if you tug at the reins you are off the road at once, and there's not much chance of struggling out of the snow. So the old lady drowsed, and it seemed as if she had already arrived, and was sitting on the stove, rocking the child in her arms, while the wolves came right into the cottage. There were so many that they jumped over one another, leaping higher and higher towards her place on the shelf above the stove.

The child could not see the wolves, and was getting better and

better, there were little red apples on his cheeks, and he held out his little hands to the old lady and called her mamma.

But still the wolves leapt higher and higher.

Then a great wave of anger came over her, she wanted to throw something at them, anything she could lay her hands on. Suddenly she got up and with the child in her arms went down on her knees in the middle of the pack, and bowing low to the ground, said:

'Dear father-wolves, not for my sake, but for the sake of this little angel, I beseech you, go away and don't frighten the child! For you are fathers yourselves!'

What the wolves said in reply to this Spiridonovna didn't hear; she had fallen into a snowdrift, and nothing could be seen but the ears of the bay horse, sticking out like a pair of horns in the snow.

The old wolf standing at the edge of the forest was puzzled; a moment ago the sleigh had appeared at the top of the hill and should have come down the slope straight towards them, but instead of doing this it had completely disappeared. Woodenhead hesitated a moment, and then gave way to the wiser vixen.

The vixen remembered a higher place than that, and led them all to the spot. Here they could all see what good fortune had come their way; the bay had left the road and fallen into the drift. Their coats gleaming like silver in the moonlight, they crept silently to the edge of the drift and looked down with their burning eyes.

Spiridonovna climbed out of the sledge, but the more she pulled at the reins the more the bay sank into the drift. She was just about to get up on to the road and try pulling the horse out herself, when suddenly she saw their burning eyes turned full on her.

She stood where she was, motionless in the snow.

The old wolf changed places again with the vixen, and planting his hind legs firmly in the snow, prepared to spring, but suddenly he stood stock still, like Spiridonovna herself.

Wolves have a peculiar fear of anything motionless, anything that might hide something living. They stand and watch, and only when, to all appearance, they have offered a silent prayer to the unknown, will they go up boldly and leave their token of esteem and awe upon it.

If the wormwood branch beneath her had snapped or broken in the frost, or if she herself had moved backwards, they would have leapt at her at once and torn both her and the bay to shreds. But instead of running away in terror, she stepped forward, fell on her knees, and bowing low to the ground, said:

'Dear father-wolves, not for my sake, but for the sake of this little angel, I beseech you, have pity on me, for you are fathers yourselves!'

Spiridonovna bowed and lay motionless in the snow, and her stillness appeared even stranger and more incomprehensible to the wolves. They were already trembling, and wondering whether they had better not run back towards the moon away from the dark, still, and evidently living being. But the wise vixen pushed her wooden-headed mate to one side, and sniffing carefully at the motionless body on the snow, left her token of respect upon it, and moved away to the edge of the clearing. Then, following her example, one after another the whole pack came up, sniffed carefully, and left their marks of respect. Step by step, doing everything just as she had shown them, they went away to the edge of the woods.

We had often heard this story of her strange night with the wolves from Spiridonovna herself, and had marvelled at their queer custom of leaving their tokens on her.

But the district nurse always ended her story with a good-natured smile:

'And when I got up, my dears, I was dripping wet!'

THE LILAC SKY

In December, if the sky is clouded over, how eerily the twilight falls in the pinewoods; the sky above becomes a kind of lilac colour, and hangs lower and lower, and soon the forest starts its own private and inhuman life.

We were hurrying homewards along the track we had taken in the morning and came across the fresh trail of a hare. A little further along we saw more new tracks. This meant that the hares, to whom our day was night, and our night their working day, had left their formes and were abroad in the woods.

The eerie lilac sky of the approaching twilight was to them like our radiant sunrise.

It was only four o'clock in the afternoon. I said:

'It will be a long night!'

'The longest night of all,' replied Yegor. 'While the hare roams and roams, the peasant sleeps and sleeps.'

THE SCENT OF VIOLETS

EVERY time I go out after the fox with the hunting dogs I make my mind up that if we do happen to make a kill, I must be sure to test the remark of the famous sportsman Zvorikin, to be found in his well-known book *Hunting the Fox*. What I have in mind is the little gland at the root of the fox's tail, which, according to Zvorikin, is able, on a frosty day, to give off the subtle aroma of violets. Zvorikin himself says that this scent of violets always 'crowns the end of a successful hunt', but it is rare to find a sportsman who can appreciate the smell; to most of them the base of the fox's tail just smells of dog; others, after a sniff, merely agree for the sake of politeness. If I hadn't known Zvorikin as an author whose lightest word was to be trusted implicitly, I would perhaps have recalled the tale of the king who had no clothes on, but to me whatever he says goes. I believe that Zvorikin does in fact get the impression of the scent of violets; that this is an interesting fact of biology, and I would like to see whether I can smell it myself or not.

The trouble is that a fox-hunt with the dogs is not always successful: sometimes the fox goes to earth; sometimes it takes the dogs so far away that you don't catch up till late in the evening. Personally I am quite satisfied if I make a kill at the second, third, fourth, or even fifth attempt. As far as I have been concerned, either I don't make a kill at all, or when I do I am so excited that I forget all about the smell. At last, however, I succeeded in making a kill in frosty weather and remembered it.

This happened one very frosty morning. A slip of moon was shining in the sky and the stars were glittering when the three of us, Y., the district council solicitor, T., the pianist at the local cinema, both excellent sportsmen, and I, set off with a couple of dogs. The musician had brought his Kostroma hound Zalivai, a recent first-class prize-winner at the local trials, and I had my old and trusty Solovya. It is always better, of course, to take only one dog, rather than two animals unused to working together, but neither of us would give in to the other and leave his own hound at home. I only mention this to warn less experienced fox-hunters not to follow our example; it is always the best plan to

go out with one dog only and one, or at most two, companions. There were any amount of foxes not far from the town, but we knew them all, they had all been scared by our local amateurs, and to hope for any sport with one of them was out of the question. For this reason we went down the main road for about ten versts, in the hope of finding some that had not so far been hunted. That day they must have been holding some kind of fair in the town, possibly a horse fair, and as we walked along we met a constant stream of peasants. Fortunately the light was very poor or they would have poked fun at us—it is an old habit of our peasants to poke fun at sportsmen. In the darkness we came upon them unawares; the gleam of moonlight on the barrels of our guns scared the horses, and they often ran off the road, and then we heard the inevitable burst of homely expressions. Sometimes, but only very rarely, a quiet horse would go by without taking any notice, while the driver, dozing on the sledge, would open his eyes for a moment, and get up in alarm, taking us for bandits, but realizing his mistake, would say, in an unexpectedly kindly tone:

'Sports—men . . .'

This went on for some considerable time, and when the dawn broke, and we could be seen easily, they all with one accord greeted us with the same crack:

'Look out, all you hares!'

And pointedly at me, the eldest of the company:

'As for you, daddy, you're wasting your time.'

This last remark shook me to some extent, so I asked the musician:

'How many of these peasants are there?'

The musician replied quite correctly:

'Millions.'

At length we came to a place where we could just distinguish the tracks of a fox on the fresh snow, and sent the dogs off. While my Solovya followed the trail he had been shown, Zalivai found another, and giving tongue from time to time, took the musician away from us for the rest of the day. The solicitor and I, following Solovya, climbed up on to some higher ground. Here among the tree-stumps we soon noticed the patches of sand on the snow which showed where the foxes had thrown it up out of the bowels of the earth. Here there were any amount of tracks

all mixed up and leading in all directions. While Solovya tried to sort all this out, we stood on the hill deciding where best to take our places for the kill, taking into account all the possible ways the animal might escape. Lower down, making an almost complete circle round the hill, there was a fairly wide brook, not yet frozen over, and flowing jet black between the blinding whiteness of its snow-covered banks. On the other side of the brook, lost in the frozen mist, lay the endless woods. The only way across the brook to the other side was provided by a huge tree-trunk which had fallen across it. It was covered with a fairly thick cushion of snow, and along this cushion, and running into the endless woods, ran a single track of footprints. This log bridge was embedded in some thick bushes on the far side, and there in the bushes a couple of finches were stripping the nuts. As soon as they had found enough, these lovely birds came down and settled on the fresh snow, standing out so distinctly that wherever you looked, your eyes were bound to come back to them in wonder. But besides this crossing there must have been another, for suddenly Solovya appeared on the far side. As soon as he found the tracks on the bridge he gave tongue and set off at full speed, the scent must have been very fresh. At once the lawyer went down from the hill-top and placed himself in a splendid position opposite the log bridge and the finches. I went down the other side to see if I could find the other crossing. Solovya by now was out of hearing, but while I was looking for a way over, the chase came straight back towards the solicitor. I rushed up to the top of the hill, so that at least I could see how the chase ended, and also to see which way the animal went if the solicitor didn't succeed in getting it. The fox jumped out of the trees on to the wide clearing, stood quite still for a second, looked all round him, and then with his easy, graceful stride ran straight to the log bridge, where the finches were still engaged in their angry nut-cracking. The solicitor as yet hadn't caught sight of the fox through the bushes, but stood behind his ambuscade, following the chase by ear. I waited in some excitement, wondering which would happen first, the sudden flight of the finches scared by the fox, or the shot of the waiting sportsman. But of course, when the crucial moment came, I forgot all about the finches. The shot was fired at the very moment when the fox showed his muzzle through the bushes, and as a result the bullet got him in

the head. Mortally wounded, the beast jumped straight up into the air, but fell back in the same spot. . . .

How we got over to the other side across the fox's bridge goodness only knows.

The beast was jumping lower and lower, and when the end came, we went up to look at him and remark how big he was. . . .

Don't pity the beast, my dear kind-hearted readers, it comes to us all in the end; I myself am almost ready for it now; the only thing that worries me is that the sportsman might look at me in disgust and say: 'How small he is!'

The fact is that I had never seen such a fox before—a huge dog-fox, old, with teeth very badly decayed.

We had no luck at all with the hares that day, there had been a light fall of snow that morning, and they had very likely decided to stay at home; we didn't come across a single one. The short winter day slipped by almost unnoticed, and when twilight began to fall we heard the musician's horn, gave him an answering call, and we joined forces again. He had seen neither fox nor hare; but he congratulated us on our fox, he was a real good sport.

We went cheerfully homewards along the main road. Unluckily for us the peasants were now returning from the fair, and having had one or two drinks, and seeing the three of us with only one fox between us, hailed us with the inevitable question:

'What? Only one?'

We made no answer to them. But there were so many of them, and the constant dripping of water at length wears away the stone.

'How many of them are there?' I asked.

Again the musician replied:

'Millions.'

At length we got very fed up with all this, and in any case we were beginning to feel rather tired, so we turned off the main road and found a path through the woods at the side. There we all sat down on a fallen tree-trunk and had a rest. The solicitor slipped the heavy fox from his shoulders, and then I suddenly remembered my long-desired wish to sniff at the base of his tail and crown the successful day's sport with the scent of violets. I told the others of this, but they started to laugh. Then I brought

in the name of Zvorikin, an authority that everybody respected, and told them about the aromatic gland, and even gave them chapter and verse for it. The musician was convinced at once and began to show as much interest as I did. The lawyer gave me the look of a man whose profession it was to weigh up human nature, trying to guess whether I was talking seriously or taking a rise out of him.

'Give it here, and let me try it,' said the musician.

He lifted the tail up quickly and sniffed, then turned away in disgust.

'It smells,' he said, 'just as you would expect an animal to smell just there.'

A smile flickered across the lawyer's face. I wanted to show my disapproval of his scepticism, and at the same time make sure we all felt the same about Zvorikin. I lifted the fox's tail and purposely took a long time over my sniffing, and then said quite seriously to the musician:

'You are mistaken, my dear fellow; probably that awful shag tobacco you smoke has spoilt your sense of smell; I wouldn't say it actually smells of violets, but at the same time there is a very subtle aroma with it.'

I succeeded in my aim; the solicitor also took a sniff.

'No,' he said, with a laugh, 'you didn't believe me, but it smells foul—the king has no clothes on.'

A thin curtain of trees separated us from the road, along which there was a continuous procession of sledges. Laughing at ourselves, we tried to imagine what these tipsy peasants would have said if they had seen us sniffing at the root of the fox's tail. What would they have said then?

In the evening, when the three of us were sitting round my table drinking tea, I remembered Zvorikin and took the book down from the bookcase, in order to convince them of this scientific fact, as described in the book. But when I came to the account of the aromatic gland, it appeared that instead of being underneath, it was situated above the tail. It appeared that this cushion of fat, which gives off the smell of violets in frosty weather, is found above the root of the tail, probably where the fox, curled up like a pancake, rests his nose in his thick coat.

As we were all reasoning this out the fox itself, after being in

the warm room for a while, gave off such a strong smell of dog that it overpowered not only violets, but the tobacco from three cigarettes. Millions of peasants, meeting us along the main road, seemed to be shouting at us:

'Hey! You're smelling the wrong place!'

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